**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE LORD’S SUPPER**

**Luke 22:1-23**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we’re going to learn about the Lord’s Supper.

Throughout the world, people mark special occasions through the use of ceremonies. A ceremony is a formal event that is full of symbolism. Think of a wedding ceremony. The bride wears a white dress to symbolize both her purity and the purity of the church whom she represents, the blood-bought people of God who have been washed clean through Christ’s death on the cross. She also walks down the aisle with her father before the father hands her over to the man who is about to become her husband to symbolize the biblical truth that marriage means leaving your father and mother and becoming one with your spouse. Later on in the ceremony the bride and groom exchange rings, which symbolize the unending love that they are pledging to one another.

Or think of a graduation ceremony. Each graduating student wears dark robes and a square topped hat to symbolize their entry into the academy. They walk across the stage and shake hands with a high-ranking school official who symbolizes the school, and that official then hands over a piece of paper which symbolizes the school’s conference of a degree. The graduates then throw their hats into the air to symbolize their joy.

Ceremonies are rich in symbolism, and it’s no different when it comes to the ceremonies of the church. Jesus gave us two of them: baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. These two religious ceremonies are rich in symbolism, meaning that they’re meant to function as signs of deeper realities.

If you’re like me, you likely grew up in a church where a lot of the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper was lost. Yes, you understood the basic symbolism of how the bread stands for Christ’s body and the cup stands for Christ’s blood, but other than that, the ceremony was largely meaningless. As we will see, however, there is so much more to this simple ceremony than many of us have understood.

That’s what we’re going to look at today as we hear about what Jesus says about the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. As we will see, Jesus actually creates this ceremony as he’s celebrating another ceremony with his disciples called the Passover, which was one of the most important religious ceremonies for the Jewish people. You could say that, from its inception, the Lord’s Supper was a ceremony within a ceremony. Or better yet, it was a reinterpretation of an Old Covenant ceremony for the New Testament era. Understanding the Lord’s Supper in the context of its Old Testament, Passover roots will help us come to an even greater appreciation for the rich symbolism contained within this ceremony given to us by Jesus himself.

The title of this sermon is **The Lord’s Supper**. My aim today is to show you **Jesus Gave Us the Lord’s Supper to Help Us Love Him More.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper
2. The Practice of the Lord’s Supper

(1) **THE MEANING OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

The first thing we need to notice about our text is that Luke really wants us to know that the events that follow are meant to be interpreted and understood through the lens of the Passover.

* Luke tells us in verses 1-2 that, as the chief priests and scribes plotted Jesus’ death, “the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover”.
* After he tells us about Judas’ betrayal in verses 3-6, he tells us in verse 7 that “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.”
* Jesus then sends Peter and John in verse 8 to go and prepare the Passover for him and the apostles by giving them very specific instructions about who to talk to and where to go.
* Everything happens just as Jesus told them it would, so in verse 13 they finish all the preparations for the Passover meal.
* Finally, in verses 14-15, with all the preparations complete, Luke tells us that Jesus says, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

It’s clear that the Passover is the interpretive grid by which we are to understand the Lord’s Supper. We can’t understand the Lord’s Supper without understanding the Passover. So what was the Passover, and what does it have to do with the Lord’s Supper?

Those who know their Old Testaments know that the Passover refers to the Exodus, the moment in history when God rescued his people from Egypt. Remember that Israel had been forced into slavery by their Egyptian neighbours. The cruelty of this slavery was most savagely displayed in Pharaoh’s attempt at population control when he ordered Jewish midwives to kill every baby boy that was born to Jewish families. As a result, the Jewish people cried out to God for help. And as they did, Exodus 2:23-24 says this:

“Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

God’s covenant compelled him to action. These were *his* chosen people, the people he promised to multiply and use to be a blessing to the nations, but here they were being murdered and enslaved by the people of Egypt.

What does God do in response? He raises up Moses to speak to Pharaoh and call him to let God’s people go, but Pharaoh refused, so God gave Moses authority to call down a series of devastating plagues upon Egypt. It began with the Nile river turning to blood. Then it became massive influxes of frogs, gnats and flies. Then the Egyptian livestock died. Then boils broke out on the Egyptian people and their livestock. Then heavy hail stones fell from the sky killing everything that was left out in the fields. Then locusts came and devoured all their crops, and God covered the land with darkness. Finally, God promised one more plague that would be the most devastating of all: a plague of death that would cause all the firstborn in the land of Egypt to die.

These ten plagues were amazing displays of God’s unlimited power, and yet the more amazing thing was that none of the plagues fell on Israel. They fell on the Egyptians alone. Israel was spared from all of them in order to show that they were God’s covenant people, not the Egyptians, and God would do whatever he had to in order to bring them back to himself.

Israel didn’t have to do anything to be spared from these plagues until the final one, when God told them what they had to do. They were to slaughter a lamb, a male lamb about a year old without blemish, and take some of its blood and put it on the doorposts of their homes, so that when the angel of death came, he would pass over the houses that had the blood on them. That’s why it’s called the Passover. The Lord came to pass through the land with judgment, but he passed over the people of Israel because of the blood of the lamb.

While they waited for the angel of death to pass over them, the Israelites were to roast the lamb’s meat and eat it with unleavened bread. Unleavened bread was bread that was made without yeast. Yeast is a baking agent that causes bread to rise. It’s what makes bread fluffy and soft. But the thing about yeast is it takes time. You need to wait for the bread to rise as the yeast does its work. By telling Israel to eat unleavened bread, he was telling them that they didn’t have time to wait for bread to rise before they ate it, because their deliverance from Egypt was coming quickly. The unleavened bread was a symbol of the haste with which God would rescue his people. And so, God commanded them to eat the unleavened bread like this in Exodus 12:11:

“In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover.”

The Lord completed his instructions to Israel by telling them that the Passover would be called “The Feast of Unleavened Bread”, and that they wouldn’t just eat this Feast once. They would eat it every year to remember how God passed over them as he brought judgment to Egypt and delivered them from slavery. The Lord called it “a memorial day” in Exodus 12:14:

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.”

Israel was to remember what God did to rescue them, so that generations down the line, their children who knew nothing of the Exodus would know what God did to rescue his people and make them his own. As Exodus 12:26-27 says,

“And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, “It is the sacrifice of the LORD’ Passover, for he passed over the houses of the People of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.”

Over time, this led to a number of traditions, including the expectation that Jews living abroad would return to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Jews had a number of religious ceremonies throughout the year, but only the three most important ones – the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread – required the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

That’s why Jesus deliberately makes plans to eat the Passover within the city of Jerusalem in verses 7-13. We don’t know if his instructions to Peter and John about the man carrying the jar of water, and the master of the house, and the large and furnished upper room were the results of Jesus’ divine foreknowledge or simply a matter of good planning, but the point is that Jesus is going out of his way to honour the Passover by eating it within Jerusalem. Luke is showing us that Jesus is a faithful, observant Jew no matter what the priests and scribes say about him.

There’s another interesting tradition that developed around the Passover. Bible scholar Robert Stein notes that, when the Passover was being celebrated, someone, usually the youngest son, was designated to ask, “Why is this night different from other nights?” And the host of the meal, usually the father of the family, would recount the Exodus story: God remembered his covenant when his people cried out to them in their oppression. He delivered his people from slavery, and he passed over them because of the blood of the lamb. And one day, he would bring about another deliverance, a greater Exodus for his people, through the Messiah who would come in the name of the Lord.

That’s what Jesus is doing as he sits down with the apostles to celebrate the Passover. He’s the host of this Passover, and he’s going to teach his apostles about its meaning. And the amazing thing about this is that, as he explains it, he doesn’t point to Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. He points to *himself*. He reinterprets the elements of the Passover in such a way that they point to him.

In verse 19, he reminds them to keep the Passover as a memorial (“do this in remembrance”) only now they’re not meant to do this in remembrance of the Exodus. They’re meant to do this in remembrance of *him* (“do this in remembrance of *me*”). Also in verse 19, he offers them unleavened bread, but now it’s no longer a symbol of their hasty rescue from Egypt. It’s a symbol of *his* broken body. And in verse 20, he teaches them not only about how God keeps his covenant, but about how God is making a new covenant in *his* blood.

In other words, Jesus is saying that, *in him*, the meaning of the Passover has changed. From now on, it’s not meant to be a reminder of Israel’s Exodus from slavery to the Egyptians. It’s meant to be a reminder of our Exodus from slavery to sin. Jesus is the true Lamb of God, the one who was slaughtered, to bring about a greater Exodus to all who trust in him.

Like Israel, we have a judgment that we desperately need to pass over us. The only difference between us and Israel is that the peril we face is far greater. Their judgment was temporary and earthly. Our judgment is eternal and unchanging. If God’s judgment should fall on us, we would face an eternity apart from him in hell. Our only hope is that the blood of God’s sacrificial lamb would cover us so that his judgment might pass over us. Jesus came to provide that for us in his death.

We need salvation from judgment, and we also need redemption from slavery. We may not be enslaved to earthly masters, but every one of us is enslaved to a spiritual master called sin, and that is far worse. Israel’s slavery was to a power outside of themselves. Our slavery is to a power within us. Israel’s slavery was cruel. Our slavery condemns us. Israel’s slavery led them to cry out to God. Our slavery hardens our hearts so that we refuse to come to him for help. Sin is a power too great for us to overcome. But now, through the blood of the lamb, God has redeemed us from that slavery, so that he might bring us back to himself.

The greater Exodus is here, and it has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And now, everything about the first Exodus is meant to remind us, and illustrate for us, what Christ has done for us so that we might love him more.

(2) **THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

That’s the essential meaning of the Lord’s Supper. It’s a memorial of the salvation from judgment and redemption from slavery that all who have trusted in Christ enjoy through our Saviour. But now I want to get a little more practical and talk about the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Who is it for? What are we to remember? And how does it help us love Jesus more?

Before I begin, I want to note that this is not a comprehensive treatment of the Lord’s Supper. Its meaning and significance is explained and developed elsewhere in the New Testament, especially by the Apostle Paul. But though I may make some reference to him, my main focus is on what our text teaches us about the Lord’s Supper, which means that certain elements of the Lord’s Supper won’t receive as much attention as they deserve.

What that in mind, I want to draw out five implications from our text that teach us about the practice of the Lord’s Supper.

1. **The Lord’s Supper is Only for Believers**

This is something that Pastor Tim and I regularly remind you of every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. This ceremony is for those who have repented of their sins and put their trust in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It’s for Christians, those who have surrendered their lives to the Lord and believe that it is only through Christ’s work on the cross that we could be forgiven of our sins and brought into a right relationship with God.

This is obvious from the fact that Jesus didn’t have an open invitation to anyone to enjoy the Passover with him. He wasn’t inviting people off the streets, or those who didn’t yet know him and follow him to share in this meal. Verse 14 tells us that he only had it with the apostles – his followers –because only they could say that God’s judgment had passed over them. For everyone else, this ceremony is absolutely meaningless. If you’re not a Christian, God’s judgment *hasn’t* passed over you. God’s redemption *hasn’t* freed you from your sin, so it would be meaningless for you to participate in the Lord’s Supper as if you were.

The Apostle Paul actually warns that, if you participate in the Lord’s Supper without true faith in Christ, you’re eating and drinking judgment on yourself. Not only are you still under God’s judgment. You are inviting God’s judgment upon yourself. So if you’re not yet a follower of Christ, the Scriptures say do not participate in the Lord’s Supper. It doesn’t matter if you grew up Catholic, or Orthodox, or even Baptist and have been participating in communion since you were a child. If you do not call Jesus Christ the Lord of your life right now, and you do not trust in him, and him alone, for the forgiveness of your sins, this ceremony is not for you.

I want to make it absolutely clear, however, that this doesn’t mean that you’re not good enough, or that others who do participate are better than you. None of us deserve to participate in the Lord’s Supper, because none of us deserve God’s grace. It’s not about whether you’re good enough. It’s about whether you’re right with God. And the only way to become right with God is through repentance from sin and faith in Christ. There is no other way. But the good news is that *this* way – the way of Christ – is always available to you as a free gift. Repent of your sins. Surrender your life to the Lord. Trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and he will welcome you with open arms to feast at his supper.

**2. The Lord’s Supper is a Remembrance**

The second thing we need to know about the Lord’s Supper is that it is a *remembrance*. As Jesus handed the bread to his apostles in verse 19, he said, “This is my body given for you; do this in *remembrance* of me.” The bread and the cup don’t have any mystical properties in and of themselves. You don’t receive any spiritual benefits just by eating them. They only bring you benefit when you remember Christ’s body broken and blood spilt for sinners like us and respond to that in faith.

Remembrance is both a mental exercise and a spiritual exercise. It’s a mental exercise because we have to exert our mental faculties to remember what Jesus did for us, and it’s a spiritual exercise because we have to respond to that with faith.

So when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we must remember how he was beaten. Remember how he was mocked and ridiculed. Remember the nails piercing his hands and feet. Remember his loneliness as he hung there alone. Remember his agony when his Father abandoned him. Remember his mighty cry, “It is finished!” before he breathed his last. And as you remember, you must respond with faith by believing that he did all this for you. Believe that he suffered and died so that you could be saved from God’s judgment. Believe that his blood washed away your sin. Believe that his death brought you eternal life and freed you from the penalty and power of sin.

And when you do that, something amazing happens when you take in the bread and the cup. Jesus comes and meets with you. He strengthens your faith and nourishes your soul. This is why we call the Lord’s Supper a means of grace. It’s a channel of God’s grace to us to bring us closer to him, just as prayer, or preaching, or fellowship do. As the Puritan Thomas Watson put it:

“The Word brings us to Christ; the Sacrament builds us up in Him. The Word is the font where we are baptized with the Holy Ghost; the Sacrament is the table where we are fed and cherished.”

The Lord’s Supper is a remembrance that we are to respond to with faith, and the most important things for us to remember are his suffering and death. But as we will see with our last three points, there are other things that Jesus wants us to remember as well.

**3. The Lord’s Supper Reminds Us that Jesus’ Death was an Act of Evil**

We are to remember that Jesus’ death was an act of evil. That’s apparent from the very beginning of our text in verses 1-5 where Luke sets the stage for the Lord’s Supper by telling us that “the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus”. The Jewish religious leaders were conspiring to murder him, but they couldn’t, because “they were afraid of the people”. Jesus was still popular at the time, so to eliminate him in public would have led to a public outcry.

Enter Satan, the one who was a murderer from the very beginning of time. Since his failed temptation of Jesus in the wilderness back in Chapter 4, he has been conspicuously absent from Luke’s narrative. We’ve heard a lot about his demonic minions as one after another they flee before Jesus and cower at his presence, but the Lord of demons has been in hiding. Why? Luke told us in 4:13 that, following the wilderness temptation, Satan was waiting “for an opportune time”.

Satan may be a liar and a murderer, but no one can accuse him of being impatient. He’s a cunning enemy, a careful plotter who will bide his time so that he makes his move at precisely the right moment. And now, as Satan saw that hatred for Jesus was festering in the hearts of the chief priests and scribes, and that Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ inner circle of apostles seemed discontent, Satan sensed that the right moment was now.

Verse 3 says that “Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve”, not in the sense of possession, but in the sense of influence. Satan doesn’t have to possess someone and control their bodies in order to use them for his purposes. He can “enter” someone in such a way that he leads them to commit evil that they’re still responsible for. That’s certainly the case here, which is why Jesus pronounces a curse on Judas in verse 22. Satan may have entered Judas, but Judas was still making his own decisions.

And what did he decide to do? He decided to betray Jesus by conspiring with the chief priests to find “an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.” The chief priests were thrilled. Verse 5 says that “they were *delighted*”, because Judas had just made their murderous job a lot easier.

That’s the context for the Lord’s Supper, and that’s the context for Jesus’ death. Jesus died because he was betrayed into the hands of men who hated him. His death was an act of evil, and we are meant to remember that when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. That’s why when Paul describes how he leads the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23, he begins by saying,

“The Lord Jesus, *on the night he was betrayed*, took bread…”

When we take the bread in our hands and remember Jesus’ body broken for us, let us not forget that it was broken because one of Jesus’ closest friends betrayed him. When we look at the blood red liquid in the cup, let us not forget that Jesus’ blood was poured out for the price of thirty pieces of silver. And as we remember the death of our Lord, let us not forget that Satan himself was at the center of his murder, twisting minds and planting seeds of darkness into the hearts of men in order to eliminate the one he hates most.

Why should we remember this? So that we might be comforted in knowing that every evil we will face was tasted first by our Saviour. Jesus knows it all. He knows the pain of being hated by those he came to save, and he knows the agony of being betrayed by one he loved. So when we face evil, we can have confidence that Jesus is walking alongside us not just to counsel us, but to sympathize with us. And as we receive this comfort, let us also be sobered as we realize that the same evil that led Jesus to the cross dwells in us as well. Jesus’ death wasn’t just an act of evil. It was the payment for the price of our evil, so that we might forsake our evil ways and live for the glory of God.

**4. The Lord’s Supper Reminds Us that Jesus’ Death was God’s Gift**

Those who understand God’s sovereignty, however, know that it’s not that simple. Yes, Jesus died because of the acts of evil men, but that’s not all. The only reason why his life could be taken was because his life was given to us as a gift. Jesus’ death was God’s gift to us.

We see that both in what Jesus says and what he does. In verse 19, Jesus says, “This is my body *given for you*.” And in verse 20, he says “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is *poured out for you*.” And as he says these things, he hands the bread and the cup to the apostles freely and voluntarily.

Jesus gave his body to be broken for us. Jesus gave his blood to be poured out for us. He gave himself over to be betrayed, and he gave himself over to be crucified. And he did all this because he loves us so. Jesus’ life may have been taken from him, but it was only because he had already given it as a gift. As Jesus said in John 10, no one could take his life from him. He lays it down of his own accord. So great is his power that the powers of hell and the schemes of men could not prevail against him unless he let them. And that’s what he did. He let the powers of evil wash over him like a raging fire, and in doing so, he actually accomplished his Father’s will, for it was the will of the Lord to crush him, not for his sins, but for ours. He died so that we might have life. We must never forget that.

**5. The Lord’s Supper Reminds Us that the Kingdom of God is Coming**

Finally, as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, let us remember not only to look back to the cross, but to look forward to the coming of God’s Kingdom. The Lord’s Supper is meant to remind us that life is not yet what it will be, because the Kingdom of God is yet to come.

We see that in verses 16 and 18 when Jesus says he will not eat the Passover again or drink the fruit of the vine “until the Kingdom of God comes”.

As we eat and drink at the Lord’s Supper, we are to remember that Jesus isn’t eating it because he’s waiting to eat it with us in his Kingdom. While we’re feasting, he’s fasting as an expression of his longing to be with us when his Kingdom comes in its fullness. In other words, the Lord’s Supper is an act of faith in Christ’s work on the cross, and it’s also an act of hope as we look forward to his return. Or as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 11:26:

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

As we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, let us remember that a better day is coming. Life is not yet what it should be. Life is not yet what it will be. We walk by faith, but one day we will walk by sight when we are finally in the glorious presence of our Saviour.

**CONCLUSION**

Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper to help us love him more by showing us the depths of his love for us. When we take the bread and the cup, let us remember not only that he saved us, but *how* he saved us. Let us discipline our minds to remember his suffering. Let us remember his betrayal. Let us remember his death. And as we remember, let us respond with faith, believing that he did all this for us as a free gift of his grace. Because of him, God’s judgment will pass over us because it passed through him instead, and we need never to fear God’s judgment. And now, we are free to live for the glory of God as those who are no longer slaves to sin, but sons and daughters of the King.