

Christian Worship: The Lord's Supper

What is the Lord's Supper?

- Three of the four Gospels include a description of Jesus eating unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine with His disciples before His death, and commanding them to do so as a group in remembrance of His death (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20) - **the Lord's Supper is the church's fulfillment of this commandment and regular participation in the memorial supper of Christ** (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

What does the Bible say about the Lord's Supper?

- Jesus Himself said that those who did not partake in His flesh and blood did not have part in Him or in the eternal life He offers, **drawing a parallel between the elements of the Lord's Supper and the elements of His sacrifice on the cross and arguing that proper participation in both is required for salvation** (John 6:35-59).
- The breaking of bread, which is understood to include practicing the Lord's Supper, **is listed among the church's earliest and most foundational practices** (Acts 2:41-42).
- Paul commanded the Corinthian church to **observe the Lord's Supper together and in reverence** rather than observing it as divided groups or with the casual environment of an everyday meal (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).

How does the church observe the Lord's Supper today?

- The church today still uses the same emblems that the church of the first century did** - unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine - as the emblems that Christ prescribed to represent His body and blood in this memorial which unifies the church around the remembrance of His death (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).
- The book of Acts includes a mention of the disciples gathering each first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7); as this is understood to refer to partaking of the Lord's Supper, and because of the importance of this memorial, **the church continues to partake of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week**.

Key Verses and Ideas:

- **Exodus 12:23** - “**For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.**” ~ The end to the Israelites’ slavery is accomplished by God’s ten plagues upon Egypt, the last of which involves the death of the firstborn of each Egyptian home (Ex 7:1-11:10). The Israelites are delivered from this punishment by God’s instruction, which includes each household eating unleavened bread and spreading the blood of a lamb over their doorposts (Ex 12:1-28; cf Lev 23:4-8). The elements of unleavened bread, the blood of a lamb, and a communal meal all foreshadow the Lord’s Supper, in which these elements find their spiritual fulfillment.
- **Psalm 22:26** - “**The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever!**” ~ Psalm 22 is often referred to as the “Psalm of the Cross” because of its phrases and images which point forward to the circumstances of Jesus’s crucifixion (Ps 22:1 & Mk 15:34, Ps 22:18 & Jn 19:23-24, etc.). It ends, however, with a triumphant vindication of God’s suffering servant and the servant’s proclamation of praise to God for his salvation - as does the Gospel (Matt 28:1-20, Heb 2:5-18). The marking of this vindication by participation in a communal meal again points forward to the special role of the Lord’s Supper among those who have been sanctified by the suffering of Christ.
- **Mark 14:25** - “**‘Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’**” ~ The first Lord’s Supper was actually Jesus’s last meal with His apostles on Earth, eaten the night before His death (Mk 14:17-21, 26-42). In saying that He would partake in this meal again in the kingdom of God, Jesus denotes the communal aspect of His memorial within the church and tells His disciples that He Himself will participate in this communion (Jn 6:55-56, 1 Jn 1:1-3). The Lord’s Supper is both a memorial to Jesus’s death and the chance to commune with Him as a congregation of His people united by His death (Ps 116:12-14).
- **Luke 22:15** - “**And He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’**” ~ The night of the first Lord’s Supper was also the first night of the Passover feast, otherwise known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lk 22:7-13). According to the commandment of God, this feast was celebrated by the Jews regularly as a memorial to the salvation of the Israelite people and to the sacrifices that made that salvation possible (Num 9:1-14, Deut 16:1-8). In instituting this new memorial on the night of the Passover sacrifice, Jesus identifies Himself as the true Passover sacrifice whose blood atones for the sins of His people (1 Cor 5:6-8).

- **Acts 2:42 - “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”** ~ It is impossible to separate the history of the early church from their fellowship and unity in the doctrine and love of Christ (Acts 4:32-35, 1 Cor 1:4-10). Part of Christ's intention in establishing the Lord's Supper was to unite His followers around the memory of His selfless sacrifice (Jn 17:20-26). It should be no surprise, therefore, that His church has honored His request, observing His memorial feast and breaking bread together as a reborn people since the very beginning of its existence on Earth (Acts 2:42-47, 20:7-12).
- **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.”** ~ In addition to memorializing Christ's death, Paul asserts that the Lord's Supper also presents an opportunity to proclaim its meaning to the world. Two additional principles arise from this thought: first, that those who would partake of the Lord's Supper should do so with His sacrifice and their faithfulness to Him in mind (1 Cor 11:27-29); and second, that those who would partake of the Lord's Supper should do so with the reverence, joy, and love of those who would share His Gospel with others (2 Cor 5:11-15, Gal 2:20).
- **Hebrews 7:27 - “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for His own sins and then for those of the**

people, since He did this once for all when he offered up Himself.” ~

Much of the Hebrews writer's argument that the covenant of Christ is better than the covenant of Moses is based on the reality of Christ's superior priesthood (Heb 4:14-16, 7:26-28, etc.). The unique nature of His sacrifice allows for an eternal purification of His people throughout time, those are united by the death and resurrection of Christ as encapsulated in the Lord's Supper (Rom 6:5-11, Heb 9:23-28).

- **Revelation 19:9 - “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”** ~ The marriage supper in question follows John's vision of the downfall of Babylon (Rev 18:1-24) and is accompanied by the coming of Christ, pictured as a victorious rider (Rev 19:11-16). This is an occasion of great victory over evil and great honor for the Lord in which all the people of God, those sanctified by Christ's sacrifice, will participate together as His Bride (Eph 5:25-30). Thus the Lord's Supper is itself a foreshadowing of eternal fellowship in heaven, where those who have been saved by Christ's blood and who have honored His memorial feast will give praise to God eternally (Rev 7:9-17, 19:1-8).

Want to learn more? We would love to study with you!
valleybiblestudies@gmail.com
540-389-9139