

## **The Lord's Supper: The Feast of the New Covenant**

**Luke 22**

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

This is our third sermon on the description of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper in Luke's gospel. To unpack this passage is to see something of the depths hidden in and under the outward simplicity of that Table. We have seen that the meal is the feast of the eschatological kingdom. All of its glory, like all of the glory of Christian existence, is the glory of heaven, the glory of the age to come, breaking back into this age.

Last week, we saw that this is the place of gratitude, for here the gospel, the gospel made liquid and edible, is made personal. This is my body which is GIVEN for YOU. And today, from the same passage, we will look at the eucharist as the feast of the new covenant. We will make two points. Remembrance (v. 19) and The New Covenant (v.20).

### **I. Remembrance**

First, then, remembrance. Jesus takes the bread, he give thanks (eucharist means thanksgiving), he breaks it, he gives it to them, saying: This is my body which is given for you. Then he says: Do this in remembrance of me. Let's unpack this remembrance. First, a brief translation issue. The text does not say, do this as my memorial. (Jesus' or God's memorial) The sacrament is not so God can remember. The language is clear: the sacrament is given by God to us, so that we would remember. Thus, all translations render this: Do this in remembrance of me.

Before we come to the notion of remembrance, notice, it's a command. Do This. An imperative. We do not have to understand all that is happening here, no one ever has or will do that. We are called, first, to DO. But what I want you to see is that this isn't just any imperative. Remember I've said, "texts need to be weighed, not counted." Well, this is a weighty command. This is THE command that Jesus leaves us on the night he was betrayed, in the shadow of the cross.

This is THE command which signifies and seals the fulfilment of the Passover, and indeed of the whole OT priestly and sacrificial system. This is the command, the ritual, the liturgy, into which, the whole life, ministry, death, and resurrection

of Christ, are condensed, and given to the church, until the Lord comes in glory. The sacrament is dense with radiance. This is the command, which has as its goal, to keep alive the memory of the Lord in the life of the church. After all, the command is not just DO – but do in a certain manner – do in remembrance of me.

And to that memory, that remembrance, we now turn. Remembering is a covenantal word. This is why remembering is connected here with the language of the new covenant in v.20. When, for example, God is said to remember his covenant, we mean that he acts in terms of the covenant. That he makes the reality of the covenant present, for the sake of his people.

Now, as I said, God is not the one remembering here, we are remembering. This is why in the prayer of thanksgiving we remember God's mighty acts, culminating here in this act. But remembering is not merely recalling Jesus' work in the past. It is not MERELY recollection (though it is that). As our act, as a human act, remembering is covenantal action by which the past is recalled for present and future benefits. Let me repeat that: remembering is a covenant activity whereby the past is recalled for present and future benefits.

So, what is being remembered here is, of course, our Lord's life and death. But this is being set in the context of a Passover meal, and thus the deeper background here is that of the Exodus and the Passover. Let's explore this just a little. When the Passover is instituted in Exodus 12, the Lord says this: "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."

There you see, it's a memorial for us, we do the remembering, as Israel was to do the remembering of the Exodus, and the first Passover. And, as you read the law, you will see that each generation is to remember as if they were present at the Exodus. Here's Exodus 13: And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.'

Each generation remembers as if it were present, because in the corporate solidarity of Israel, they were present. So the past is never merely the past here. Israel remembers what God did for THEM in the past, as they are celebrating in the present, and looking to the future Exodus the future deliverance promised in the prophets. Namely, the future restoration of all things.

And in the act of remembering, we do the same here. For the hopes of Israel, all the promises of God, are yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. For this is the greater Exodus, and the final Passover sacrifice. And, if you are in Christ, then you and your sins, you and your judgment, you and your slavery, bondage and death, are defeated here. This is the remembrance of your liberation. You were present in Christ, united with him, when he offered himself as the Passover Lamb. And in

remembering the past, the power of the cross becomes present, here and now, at the table. The once for all offering of Christ, shows its power for cleansing and liberation in our midst. And here we yearn, we long and hope, for our, and for all of creations' future liberation from bondage to death.

So, again, this is not mere recollection. To remember is to grasp the past for present and future benefit. By remembering-- the power of Christ's cross is extended to the church's present distress and need, in fervent anticipation of the day when all enemies, including death, are subdued. Thus, rooted in Israel's remembering of the Exodus and Passover, this remembering gathers up the past, the present, and the future. Here, the reality of Jesus' saving death, is permanently set before the eyes, and etched into the hearts, of the church. Here all the benefits of Calvary are freshly extended and generously offered to you.

But don't miss this: Here a command is given to us all. And it isn't merely DO. It's: Do this in remembrance of me. *And to obey this command we must be able to remember/recall/re-appropriate this self-offering.* And there is an ethical dimension to remembering: Israel is called upon to remember the Lord. And it's clear that remembering is the opposite of forgetting (disobedience).

Remembering is thus pledging obedience to the One who has so graciously redeemed us. To partake of the supper without this remembrance, is to gut the Supper of its significance. So as you come to "do," come remembering.

## **II. The New Covenant**

Our second point is the new covenant. Now we use the word covenant a lot around here and rightly so. Reformed theology is covenant theology and we are going to have to do some covenant theology here. Over the cup Jesus says: This cup, that is poured out for you, is the new covenant in my blood. This is a startling thing. The gift of the Supper IS the gift of the new covenant (it's renewal).

This language is rooted, again, in the Exodus context. In Exodus 24, when Moses confirms the Sinai covenant with Israel, we read: And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

What Moses calls the blood of the covenant Jesus calls the new covenant in my blood. Here, the Mosaic covenant is set aside, for Israel was unable to keep it, and the new covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31, is realized, and communicated to us through the blood, that is the death, of Christ. The covenant that Christ mediates is better than the old covenant, we are told, for it is enacted on better promises (better hope, sacrifices, country). Hebrews 8 cites Jeremiah 31, and tells us just what the New Covenant is. For if that first covenant (Mosaic) had

been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them (people) when he says:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ...not like (the new and the Mosaic are not alike!) the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

The new covenant takes the law and inscribes it on our hearts, the new covenant brings in full and final pardon of our sins. They are remembered no more. God does not act in terms of them toward us. *The Hebrews 8 text goes on to say: The Mosaic covenant is obsolete, and is now vanishing away.* This does not mean the law is irrelevant, it is, as we just saw, written into our hearts. But the Mosaic order of things, as a covenantal administration, is set aside. And we live in the new covenant, where the promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled, and the curse of the Mosaic law has been borne for us. And the essence of the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins, and the law being written in our hearts.

All this is ours through the death of Christ. Thus, when Jesus says: This is the new covenant in my blood, he is renewing, extending, communicating, the forgiveness of sins to us, he is seeking to inscribe his holy law in the depths of our hearts. The remission of sins and the renewal of our hearts in purity and holiness go hand and hand. Here we literally eat and drink the reality of, the benefits of, the new covenant itself.

What an astonishing, full and complete gift this is! Because it is the self-giving of Christ himself, clothed with his gospel. Christ and all his benefits. What other thing is there in the Christian life that you can point to and say: This IS – not in part, but in whole – This IS the new covenant. And that is what Jesus does here, through his minister, when he hands you this cup and says: this is the of the new covenant in my blood. AS Calvin puts it: It is only through the appointed act of a spiritual drinking of blood that the Covenant is made firm and effective. Notice, here the new covenant, is made firm and effective. That is, the realities of the new covenant are sealed, stamped, confirmed to your repentant, remembering faith in this meal. (Means: We publicly assuming, taking on, publicly embracing, the obligations of the covenant entailed in your baptism – thus a profession)

Now, we believe here that worship is best described as covenant renewal. That is what we are doing with the order and the logic of our service. We are being renewed in covenant with God. If you haven't had a chance to read the tract called the Lord's Service, I encourage you to pick one up in the lobby – for there

we explain our service and unpack what is meant by covenant renewal worship. But in any event, the basic idea is clear. The way God relates to creatures, our confession says, is by way of covenant. And the way he relates to redeemed creatures is by way of the new covenant.

The new covenant, as the final, eternal fulfillment of all God's covenants, all his purposes, was established in the death and resurrection of Christ. We are thus in the new covenant. That is the form of God's relationship with us. And that covenant is administered to us, communicated to us, by means of the Word (the gospel) and the sacraments. What you get in the gospel, is then sealed to you visibly at the table. That cup is the essence, the substance, the life, the renewing power of the new covenant. Covenant renewal worship is sealed there. For this is the rite of covenant renewal. For what we are remembering is, first: the past establishment of the covenant in the new exodus, the Passover sacrifice of Christ. And what we remember is, second, the current renewal of the covenant as we apply Christ's blood to our sins at the table. And what we remember is third, the future, the future consummation of the covenant.

Where "remembrance" becomes vision, becomes the fully present reality of the One who is the substance of the covenant, Christ himself in his present glory. Where the sifting and discernment and self-judgment that goes with that table has ended. *When the members of the new covenant will be identical to the elect in glory. Where all have been forgiven, and all have the law written in their hearts and minds.* And, as the prophet said, they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

What we have called the feast of the eschatological kingdom is also the feast of the new covenant. For the kingdom comes by means of covenant. And here we are judged, cleansed and renewed, in holy, obedient remembering of Christ, who is himself the sum and substance of the sacrament, the feast of the new covenant. Until, with him, we eat it again, when it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Amen.

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