

The Lords Supper – What Do We Keep Repeating It?

1. Warm up: What's one of the most memorable dinners you've ever experienced, not because of what you ate, but because of the meaningfulness of the experience?
2. On Sunday we concluded our "Dinner With Jesus" sermon series by studying *the* most famous dinner in the history of the world – the Last Supper. Every Sunday Christians across the globe reenact the Last Supper in the form of Holy Communion. Jesus himself told us to do so. Most of us have experienced it a thousand times, but we may never have heard anyone explain why. So on Sunday we took a deep dive into the meaning of Holy Communion, focusing on three key points Jesus made at the Last Supper. Let's start by re-reading Matthew 26:20-30, as printed on p. 3.
3. As Jesus' ministry unfolded, he warned his disciples that it would inevitably lead to his death. For example, in John 10:11 Jesus said, "[A] good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. [But] I am the good shepherd . . . , and I lay down my life for the sheep."
 - a. It's hard to imagine the depth of love it would take to voluntarily give your life so someone else can live. Jeff reminded us of a teacher in who left the safety of his locked classroom to confront a shooter in an attempt to save lives. He ended up being shot dead. Have you ever faced a situation where you could have risked your life for someone else? How did you react? If you've not faced a situation like that, how do you think you would react? What kind of internal state of heart and mind is required to do something that heroic?
 - b. Jesus saw us as his little lambs. He loved us so much, he gave his life for us. But why did he have to die for us? He told us at the Last Supper. "While they were eating, Jesus . . . took a cup . . . , saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for **this is my blood of the new covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" Matthew 26:27. Jesus shed his blood to establish a New Covenant, i.e., a new understanding of how God interacts with us. The old understanding of how God interacts with us in the Old Testament was performance based. Abraham and his descendants cut a deal with God, promising to keep God's commandments in exchange for which God was expected to bless, prosper, and protect them. Have you ever gone through a phase in your spiritual life where your understanding of God was stuck in this old performance-based, fear-based way of relating to God? What was that like? How did it feel? How well did you "perform"?
 - c. The institutional religious leaders of Jesus' day embraced the Old Covenant with gusto, emphatically teaching people to be obsessive compulsive about keeping all the commandments, so as to earn God's favor. Many churches today seem to want to gravitate back to this old understanding. Why do you think religious people and religious institutions are so drawn to this old understanding?

- d. Jesus upended the Old Covenant. He taught that you don't need to earn God's favor; you already have it. You don't need to earn it, you just have to accept it. Because in this New Covenant you are saved by grace – God's unconditional love – when you have enough faith to dare to believe that God already loves you infinitely and wants to be in close personal relationship with you (Ephesians 2:8). Viewed this way, the only thing that can keep you away from God is you. At what point on your spiritual journey do you feel you were finally able to embrace this new understanding? What brought you to that point?
 - e. Why was this new understanding so threatening to the institutional religious leaders that they decided they had to kill Jesus?
 - f. Why did Jesus refuse to back down even though he knew his message would cost him his life? What motivated him?
4. What we've discussed so far establishes the first key meaning of Communion. Jesus shed his blood to bring us into a New Covenant relationship with God based on grace. But Matthew 26:26 also points us to a second key meaning. "While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.'" When we consume the bread at Communion we are, by our actions, saying, "Jesus, I want more of you in me. I want you to be in me. I want to become a living, breathing embodiment of you."
- a. That's a daring prayer because Jesus was all about sacrificial love. When we ask to become like him, God will give us lots of opportunities to practice sacrificial love. Jeff shared the example of Louann Lowring Daniels caring for her dying brother. It nearly broke her, yet it's one of the most beautiful and meaningful things she will ever do. She was the hands and feet of Jesus to her brother. When in your past have you been called upon to practice sacrificial love in a deep way?
 - b. Is there a situation in your life right now where you have the honor and opportunity to practice sacrificial love? Do you see it as a burden or opportunity?
5. The third key meaning of Holy Communion is found in Matthew 26:29. As he passed the cup around the table, he said, "Drink from it, all of you . . . for I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus knew the bottom was about to drop out of his disciples' world. He was going to be tortured to death the next day. So the last thing he said to them was, in effect, "No matter how bad it gets, I want you to remember, a better day is coming! Someday we're going to feast together again in heaven." That same hope can sustain us. Someday each of us will share meals with Jesus at heaven's banquet tables face-to-face. Describe what you think that will be like. What will be on the menu? Who will be there? What kinds of things will be discussed? What will that experience feel like? How can that future vision help us through tough times here on earth?

Matthew 26:20-30

20 When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.' ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, 'Surely not I, Lord?' ²³He answered, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' ²⁵Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.'

26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' ²⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.