

Breaking Bread – Part 1 – The New Passover Supper

Luke 22:7-13 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

Jesus told Peter and John to prepare for the Passover meal and they asked Him where it should be. His answer was elaborate and detailed.

It is clear from this that Jesus intended that the celebration should be properly prepared and also that its location really mattered. Either Jesus Himself had arranged the place or, as seems likely, the Holy Spirit made the arrangements having given directions to both Jesus and the owner of the upper room.

Have we given the same prayerful consideration to the location and preparation of breaking bread? When we compare the gospel account to the current usual practice of breaking bread in a church service, two contrasts are immediately obvious: firstly the preparation involved in sharing a piece of bread and a cup of wine is insignificant compared with a meal, and secondly the location in a church service is entirely different from in a family room. Jesus could easily have located the meal in the temple court in view of its great significance and connection with temple sacrifices. Or he could have located it in a synagogue in nearby Bethel where he was known and loved. But Jesus intended that it should be in a secular space, in an ordinary home.

We have got so used to "breaking bread" in a church service that it is hard for us to think about this occasion as the disciple would have. We get a much better idea if we think of celebrating Christmas. Like Christmas, Passover was a major annual celebration. The meal was a central and essential part. You could not begin to think of celebrating it without a big carefully prepared meal. Neither would it occur to you to have your Christmas meal in church, despite it being a celebration of Jesus' birth. Neither would you think of joining in with a dozen other families to have a big joint affair. You would hopefully want to invite one or two lonely people to join in with you, or you might want to do something especially for lonely people. But you would want it to be as "authentic" as possible – a great meal with a family feel and lots of conversation and maybe some games. Neither would you dream of asking a priest to officiate over the celebration. Passover was not Christmas, but I think it was a lot closer to Christmas than it is to "breaking bread" in a church service.

It was therefore natural for the disciples to ask about its preparation and location. They were not at home, so needed to find somewhere they could celebrate. They found a "man of peace" to offer his home. He was not someone the disciples knew, but he welcomed them. No doubt he and his household helped the disciples cook the meal, prepare the room and witnessed their celebration. It seems likely that he went on to become a disciple.

Luke 22:14-15 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

To the disciples, this was just another Passover celebration, one of a lifetime of such annual celebrations. But for Jesus this was special. How long had Jesus "eagerly desired to eat this Passover" with them? Since leaving Galilee on their way to the festival in Jerusalem?

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51)

Or was it since the very beginning of His ministry, when at the wedding in Cana He said to Mary, "My hour has not yet come"? Or had Jesus been looking forward to this meal since the original Passover back at the beginning of Israel's history? Or perhaps since the Fall or the very dawn of creation?

The point is that for Jesus this was not *a* Passover celebration but *the* Passover celebration, to which all previous ones had been pointing. Judgement has been lifted from God's people and would now and forever pass over them as Jesus Himself becomes our righteousness. The disciples had been celebrating Passover since childhood without ever truly understanding it. **Is it possible that we too have been celebrating Breaking Bread for years without ever truly understanding it?**

We can only imagine what it must have been like for Jesus to celebrate this meal with a bunch of people who had no idea of its eternal significance. I can imagine Him wishing that Elijah and Moses, who he shared with at the Transfiguration, could have been there. He must have longed to talk about the big-picture of God's eternal purposes and the true meaning of Passover and the huge significance of the New Covenant. But instead the disciples kept bringing the focus of conversation back to themselves – who would betray Jesus, who was the greatest, who would never deny Jesus...

Luke 22:15-19 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. **(16) For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.**" After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus again emphasises how unique this occasion is by telling the disciples that this meal and this drink (v17) would be His last "**until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God**". He wanted the disciples to understand that this was a turning point in history that would usher in the Kingdom that they had spent the previous three years announcing and demonstrating. He is surely also telling them that the terrible events about to unfold are not the end, but the fulfilment of the Passover they had been celebrating for years without properly understanding it.

These words are key to understanding this meal. There are some things which are fulfilled and finished with, but there are others that are fulfilled and continue. The priesthood pointed to Jesus but has now been finished with (Hebrews 7:11,18). The Law pointed to Jesus and is now finished with (Hebrews 8:13). The temple pointed to Jesus and is fulfilled and finished with (Hebrews 9:8). The Sabbath pointed to Jesus and is now fulfilled and finished with (Colossians 2:16-17). But the Passover meal is different. It is fulfilled in the cross but has a continuing purpose. The Passover meal is not simply pointing to Jesus. It was prophetic of a Kingdom meal, a meal with a purpose in the Kingdom of God. Jesus told His disciples about this, but we have forgotten it. We will come to this soon.

Jesus did not have to wait long before the Passover was fulfilled in His death on the cross. One of His first acts after His resurrection was to eat with his disciples – something that Luke makes a point of recording:

Acts 10:48 "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."

The point of course is that the Passover is now fulfilled and the Kingdom has come. We are forever delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light. Up to this point the Passover had been both a reminder of past deliverance and also a promise of future deliverance. But that future deliverance had now come and there was no longer a need to look back to the original Passover. This new Passover was not meant to be a ceremonial remembrance of Jesus' death, but a living remembrance of Jesus' life as the present King in His Kingdom. **Do we treat the breaking of bread merely as a memorial or as fulfilling a Kingdom purpose?**

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Jesus takes the bread and the cup and gives thanks. This is the thanksgiving before the meal (saying grace as we might call it). He then tells the disciples to divide it among themselves. I think this instruction was intentional and important. He deliberately gave the disciples responsibility to share the food out because it created an opportunity for heart attitudes to be revealed – for good or for bad. He then used it as an opportunity for teaching them about servanthood (vv24-30).

Later in the NT we see this working out amongst another group of disciples:

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

For various reasons the traditional churches stopped having a meal when celebrating the Lord's supper. One of the reasons given is because Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 14:40 "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

A meal usually involves a certain degree of disorderliness, especially compared to a liturgical service. By leaving the meal out, so that all you have is the thanksgiving, you certainly have something more orderly. But is this what Jesus wants? Do we really think that God is concerned with orderliness in our services – or is His concern the attitudes of our hearts

that give rise to disorderliness? Remember that Jesus' own Last Supper was a proper meal, with lively discussion and it also resulted in a lively argument.

There is no suggestion that Jesus was embarrassed at the disorderliness of His meal, or that Paul thought it would be better to leave the meal out. For both Jesus and Paul, their response to the bad attitudes that emerged from the meal was to address the heart attitudes. The meal is an important aspect of discipleship – it is an opportunity to show interest and concern for one another, to talk about Jesus, to serve one another. It is also an opportunity for selfishness and bad attitudes to be seen so that the deeper needs of the community can be identified and addressed.

Have we made our breaking of bread so orderly that it has lost its ability to reveal our heart attitudes towards one another?

I suggest therefore that both the meal, and the instruction that the members should share it amongst themselves, are important aspects of what Jesus instructed us to do together. Leaving these aspects out removes the opportunity for discipleship.

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We have already seen that Jesus ate and drank with the disciples and many others after the resurrection, so we can take those meals as proof that Jesus considered that His Kingdom had indeed come.

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Jesus now introduces a completely new idea into the Passover meal. Jesus points to the **bread** they are sharing and eating, not the Passover lamb! Jesus was the Passover Lamb (as John the Baptist recognised – John 1:29 "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!") so we would expect Jesus to say "This *lamb* is My Body broken for you" but instead He points to the bread. He calls the bread "My body" but He doesn't say it is *broken* for them, but *given* for them. This is clearly a reference to what He had previously said about being the Bread of Life that the Father gave:

John 6:32-59 "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven ... I am the bread of life ... This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world ... my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink ... The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life."

Here Jesus tells us that He Himself is the food and drink we need to sustain us in life. Jesus clearly means His teaching and His example and not just His sacrificial death – "[My] words ... are full of the Spirit and life". So we conclude that in the Last Supper Jesus offered

the bread as a symbol and reminder of His life and teachings, not just His death. It is remarkable that Jesus never even mentioned the Passover Lamb. It is also remarkable that Jesus never taught about what or how His death would accomplish our salvation.

The fact that Jesus diverts attention towards the bread suggests to me that He intended the focus of the meal to be a remembrance of His life and teachings, rather than dwelling on His death.

A further indication of this is His use of the phrase "do this in remembrance of me." It is inconceivable that Jesus was concerned that we might forget that He died for us unless we regularly broke bread in order to remember it! Think about this. Do you think we need to break bread to stop us forgetting that Jesus died? The Salvation Army don't celebrate the Last Supper but they have not forgotten the Cross. The idea that we need to celebrate the Last Supper lest we forget the Cross is bizarre and ridiculous. That is not what remembrance of the dead is for. People do not remember the dead to remember their death, but to remember their life.

The purpose of celebrating the last supper is not to remind us **that** Jesus died for us, but **why** He died. His toast at the end of the meal (Luke 22:20) tells us what Jesus wanted us to remember – the New Covenant. In other words the celebration is about His life in us now, not His death for us 2000 years ago.

"Do this in remembrance of me" is very likely a reference to the Jewish practice of sharing bread and wine in remembrance of the life of someone who has died:

Jeremiah 16:4,7(NKJV) "they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried ... Nor shall men break bread in mourning for them, to comfort them for the dead; nor shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or their mother."

Jeremiah is writing about a terrible judgement to come where so many will die that they will be left unburied and un-mourned for. But what we learn is that the custom was to *break bread and share a cup of consolation* when someone died (the NIV is not so clear). Jesus adds this custom to the Passover celebration at the Last Supper because this meal is not just the remembrance of deliverance, but the remembrance of an extraordinary *life*. Whenever people remember their dead, they remember their lives, not the details of their death. That is surely what Jesus intends for us. We are to feed on His word and His example and on His living presence with us, remembering that in His death He has not left us as orphans, but He is forever with us (Matt 28:20) and is coming again in Glory.

The practice of focussing on the death of Jesus when we celebrate the Last Supper is, I believe, missing the point. It is His Life that feeds us, not His death. It seems to me that the focus of conversation when we celebrate the Last Supper should be the words and life of Jesus and His present effect on our lives. This is made even clearer in the next verse in Luke's account:

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

After they had shared both the meal and their conversation, Jesus raised the cup in a similar way that we would propose a toast after a special meal. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." This is the first clear reference in the meal to His death.

But notice that Jesus does not say "This cup is *My blood* which is poured out for you" but "This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood, which is poured out for you." Jesus is drawing our attention *to* the New Covenant, and not dwelling on His death.

The Law of Moses was written on stone tablets, but Jesus' New Covenant was to be written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people ... they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Luke 22:20 "This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood, which is poured out **for you**."

This is what Jesus was "toasting" – the fact that **we** can now all know the Lord ourselves through the Spirit. Jesus says to celebrate that He gave Himself **for us**. Jesus is saying, "Don't you ever forget what I have accomplished for you. Don't go back to the Law. Don't go back to slavery. Don't forget that I am with you always and alive forevermore. Don't forget that you are seated with me in the heavenly places to rule with me in My Kingdom. That is why after the meal Jesus said to them:

Luke 22:29-30 "I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that **you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**"

This is the point and purpose of celebrating the Last Supper "in remembrance of me". And this, I believe is the purpose that the meal "fulfils" in His Kingdom. The meal is not meant to be simply a remembrance of Jesus' death, but a remembrance that He lives and reigns in His Kingdom, and that we are meant to sit with Him and reign with Him in His kingdom. Jesus said to His disciples, and He says to you and I, "I confer on you a kingdom. And now I invite you to "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." **How have you responded to Jesus' invitation?**

Let us review what we have learnt and consider our response.

1. What differences are there between how you have been celebrating the Breaking of Bread and what Jesus did and told us to do?
2. What location do you think Jesus wants you to use to celebrate the Breaking of Bread?
3. What do you think Jesus wants you to prepare?
4. Who does Jesus want you to invite?
5. Do you think Jesus is as eager to share the celebration with you as He was with His disciples? What is He eager about?
6. Do you think you may have something to learn from Jesus about the significance of this celebration? What do *you* think about when you break bread? What do you think *Jesus* is focusing on?
7. Why do you think that all other aspects of the Law have passed away, except the celebration of the Passover meal?

8. What purpose do you think the celebration fulfils in His Kingdom?
9. Why do you think Jesus was so eager to eat and drink with his followers after his resurrection?
10. What role in discipleship do you think is played by the act of sharing out food?
11. What kind of orderliness do you think Jesus is looking for in the celebration?
12. The Passover meal and sacrifice was a lamb. Why do you think Jesus made bread the symbol of the celebration instead of the lamb?
13. Jesus said to celebrate the Breaking of Bread in remembrance of Him. What do you think He wants you to remember?
14. Looking over Luke's account of the Passover meal, what mood do you detect in Jesus? To what degree is it solemn and mournful and focussed on His imminent death, and to what degree is it joyful and victorious and looking beyond the cross? What mood do you think Jesus wants to see in you when you celebrate the Breaking of Bread?
15. Meditate on Luke 22:29-30. Is this a passage you have given attention to before? What is Jesus saying to you? Do you feel invited to this table? What does Jesus want you to do at that table? How does Jesus want you to share in ruling in His Kingdom?
16. Do you think that sitting with Jesus and ruling with Him in His Kingdom might be the fulfilment of the Passover meal that Jesus wants you to celebrate?
17. How will you change the way you celebrate the Breaking of Bread to align more closely with what Jesus wants you to do?