

A Piece of the Loaf

A small portion to bless God's family of faith



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Part I. When you come together

The Last Supper. The very mentioning of this term puts images in our hearts and minds that may or may not match what actually happened in Scripture. So, what exactly happened? And what does this imply about how we can practice our faith? Let's dive into Scripture and ask that question.

- Chapter 1, "*A lamb for each household*" — describes how Jesus broke the Law when he celebrated the Passover containing the Last Supper. Or did he?
- Chapter 2, "*Do this in remembrance of me*" — asks a simple question: "What did Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him?" and begins to answer the question by harmonizing all of the accounts of the Last Supper.
- Chapter 3, "*Proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" — continues asking "What did Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him?" by comparing the events of the Last Supper with Paul's "when you come together" discourse in 1 Corinthians 11-14. We are separated from Jesus by some 2000 years, Paul by somewhat less than that. Does Paul's teaching help us understand any better what Jesus meant?

1. “A lamb for each household”

Tell the whole community of Israel, ‘In the tenth day of this month they each must take a lamb for themselves according to their families – a lamb for each household.

--Exodus 12:3 (NET)

So the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he took his place at the table with the twelve.

--Matthew 26:19-20 (NET)

As we look at the above verses carefully, it appears that Jesus disobeyed what the Father revealed regarding how the Passover was to be celebrated. Or did he?

1.1. Faith, a family matter

In the Old Testament, faith in God and fellowship with him is nearly always presented in the context of a family.

- God the Father with Adam and Eve in the garden.
- Noah and the seven other family members who were saved on the Ark.
- Lot and his family saved out of Sodom.
- Abram and God's promise to give him a family and make his family a nation.
- The *children* of Israel.
- Pages and pages and pages of genealogies!
- The sons of Levi got to serve God in the temple and tabernacle.
- The sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun led the worship in the temple.
- The house of Israel, house of Jacob, house of David, house of Levi...
- Lists of families that returned to Jerusalem from the captivity in Babylon.
- ...and on and on.

In addition, the Jewish festivals were celebrated as family events. In fact, in the Law of Moses, God *specifically commanded* for several of them—including Passover, as noted in the verses quoted above—to be celebrated family by family.

1.2. The last Passover, a new family of faith

In the verses we quoted at the beginning, we see that Jesus told his disciples to prepare the Passover for all of them. And then he sat down to eat the Passover with them.

But God had spoken through Moses that "each must take a lamb for themselves according to their families" Thus,

according to the Law of Moses, Jesus should have dismissed his disciples to all go to their families and celebrate Passover with them, and then to gather back together again later.

But he didn't, because rather than fulfilling the Law according to the flesh, Jesus was going to fulfil the Law according to the Spirit, in a prophetic or symbolic sense.

- God had told the people of Israel through Moses to "take a lamb according to their families."
- In a spiritual sense, the disciples were the family. And Jesus was the Lamb of God.

The result is that what Jesus did was completely appropriate according to the Law of the Spirit of life.

On the Passover day, the Lamb had to be killed and eaten. Symbolically Jesus fulfilled this also.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." And after taking the cup and giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant..."

--Matthew 26:26-28 (NET)

After the meal, he finished fulfilling this prophesy.

After the meal, Jesus--God's Lamb--got up from the table, walked to Calvary, and literally was slain for our sins--so that we, too, could leave this world just as the Israelites left Egypt.

Tell the whole community of Israel, 'In the tenth day of this month they each must take a lamb for themselves according to their families – a lamb for each household.

--Exodus 12:3 (NET)

Today Jesus invites all God's children to "do this in remembrance of him" and Paul adds that "as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim our Lord's death until he comes." So today, too, we can eat this meal together.

And when two or three of God's children are gathered together in his name, Jesus promises to be present today too (Matthew 18:20).

Consequently, today we can again be God's family assembled with the Lamb present. Today, Jesus invites us to share the feast with him and listen to him teach us. And today, Jesus invites us to break the bread and share the cup again--both in remembrance of what he did and in anticipation of the Day when we will share the cup again with him in God's Kingdom.

Tell the whole community of Israel, 'In the tenth day of this month they each must take a lamb for themselves according to their families – a lamb for each household.

--Exodus 12:3 (NET)

So the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he took his place at the table with the twelve.

--Matthew 26:19-20 (NET)

2. “Do this in remembrance of me”

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way he took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

--Luke 22:17-20 (NET)

What does Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him? What are the implications of this for our understanding of the Body of Christ? In order to really understand this, we must first look at exactly what Jesus and the disciples did that last supper. Then we need to ask, “What did the early disciples understand Jesus to mean?”

The following outline describes what happened, and was produced simply by harmonizing what all of the Gospels and 1 Corinthians say about the Last Supper.

2.1. A harmony of the Last Supper

- Start of the meal (Mk 14:17; Matt 26:20; Luke 22:14)
 - Jesus predicts his betrayal (Mk 14:18; Matt 26:21)
 - Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you..." (Luke 22:14)
 - “Fruit of the Vine” shared: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes" (Matt 26:29, Luke 22:17-18)
- During the meal (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26; 1Cor 11:23)
 - Jesus washes disciples' feet (John 13:1-17).
 - Bread broken; "This is my body which is broken for you" (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:17-18; 1 Cor 11:23-24); Jesus says: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-24)
- After the meal: Preparation for a time of teaching
 - “Fruit of the Vine” given to each individual AGAIN. "The cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood" (Matt 26:27-28; Mk 14:24-25; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:24)
 - "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-24)
- Jesus deals with the need for love in the Body
 - Jesus predicts his betrayal again! (Luke 22:21-38, Jn 13:18-30)
 - Disciples argue about who is greater (Luke 22:21-38)
 - Jesus predicts Peter's denial (Luke 22:21-38, John 13:31-38)

- Jesus leads a time of teaching and prayer
 - Vine/branches discourse (John 15 1-17)
 - The World's hatred / promise of the Holy Spirit (John 15:18-16:18)
 - Jesus tells about how he reveals the Father; overcomes the world (John 16:19-33)
 - High priestly prayer (John 17)
 - Jesus tells them to get money bag, traveling bag, cloak, swords (Luke 22:21-38)
- Conclusion of meeting:
 - Sang a hymn (Mk 14:26; Matt 26:30)
 - Depart for Mount of Olives (the mountain of the Holy Spirit—where olives are grown to be crushed.)

2.2. What does Jesus want us to do to remember him?

When we examine this sequence of events, a few things might strike us:

- The Last Supper had two basic parts:
 - A meal
 - A time of teaching led by Jesus
- At the beginning of the meal, Jesus invited the disciples to share the “fruit of the vine”, or in their culture, the wine.
- At the end of the meal, Jesus shared “fruit of the vine” *again*, immediately before he began the time of teaching.

Since wine is the sort of beverage that one sips, rather than guzzling down a glass all at once, the reasonable expectation is that Jesus had them share the wine at the beginning of the meal, they sipped it throughout, and then he offered them a refill, as it were, to begin the time of teaching.

But Jesus didn't stop there, the second time he divided the wine, Jesus did two things:

- He identified the wine with the new covenant in his own blood.
- Just as he had with the bread, he commanded the disciples to “Do this in remembrance of me.”

What did Jesus want the believers to do in remembrance of him? The wine had been shared throughout a full meal and the time of teaching afterward. Was that the context that Jesus intended or was he simply referring to the elements of the bread and the wine when he told us to “Do this in remembrance of me”?

One hint to the answer lies in comparing Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the Last Supper. Matthew describes Jesus sharing the wine a single time, and associated with this, saying “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again

until the Kingdom of God comes" (what Jesus said the *first* time), and "The cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood" (what Jesus said the *second* time he shared the cup. So, to Matthew, it seems that the sharing of the cup encompassed both the meal, and the time of teaching afterward.

What about the rest of Scripture? Can we be reasonably sure that this understanding is accurate?

The easiest way to answer this question is to ask how the disciples themselves understood Jesus. We are separated from him by around 2000 years, by language, by culture, etc.

But the disciples and early apostles had none of these impediments. They were ideally situated to understand exactly what Jesus intended.

That will be the topic of our next study.

3. “Proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”

*“Do this in remembrance of me.” For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.
--From 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NET)*

In this chapter, we will continue asking "What does Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him?" In Chapter 2, “*Do this in remembrance of me*”, Matthew gave us a hint about this by identifying the "cup" as an event that spanned the entire meal and time of teaching afterward. Here, we will ask, "Does comparing what happened the night Jesus was betrayed with Paul's instruction to the Corinthians help us understand better?"

3.1. Comparison to Paul's description of a church meeting

In Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, Paul is addressing various problems in the Corinthian church, and as a result, describes how he wanted their meeting to be run. Let's outline the topics that Paul covers when he discusses what to do “When you come together” in 1 Corinthians 11-14 in comparison with the events of the Last Supper and see how they line up:

Table 3.1. The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians	The Last Supper
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Lord's Supper as a full meal<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The problem: Some over-ate and got drunk before their brothers even arrived (11:17-22)• Reminder of how Jesus instituted the meal (11:23-26)• Discerning the Lord's Body is part of healthy spiritual life (11:27-32)• Conclusion: If you're that hungry, eat a bit before you come to the Supper (11:33-34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start of the meal (Mk 14:17; Matt 26:20; Luke 22:14)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus predicts his betrayal (Mk 14:18; Matt 26:21)• Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you..." (Luke 22:14)• “Fruit of the Vine” shared: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes" (Matt 26:29, Luke 22:17-18)• During the meal (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26; 1Cor 11:23)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jesus washes disciples' feet (John 13:1-17).• Bread broken; "This is my body which is broken for you" (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:17-18; 1 Cor 11:23-24); Jesus says: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-24)

1 Corinthians	The Last Supper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual Gifts connect the Head to the individual Members of the Body • Introduction: What lifts Jesus up as Lord is from the Holy Spirit (12:1-3) • The gifts are given to individuals for the benefit of all (12:4-7) • Different manifestations of the same Holy Spirit in different people (12:8-11) • We are different members of the same Body (12:12-31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the meal: Preparation for a time of teaching • “Fruit of the Vine” given to each individual AGAIN. "The cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood" (Matt 26:27-28; Mk 14:24-25; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:24) (Wine given to each individual is a picture of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because the wine is a symbol of the blood, and speaking spiritually, our life is the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus flowing through the Body of Christ.) • "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-24)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love • Gifts without love are just lifeless noise (13:1-7) • Gifts will cease when we see Jesus face to face but love never ends (13:8-13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus deals with the need for love in the Body • Jesus predicts his betrayal again! (Luke 22:21-38, Jn 13:18-30) • Disciples argue about who is greater (Luke 22:21-38) • Jesus predicts Peter's denial (Luke 22:21-38, John 13:31-38)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you come together, spiritual gifts enable Jesus to lead His Body (14:23-26) • Prefer to edify others when seeking tongues versus prophesy (14:1-19) • The use of tongues and prophesy in evangelism (14:20-25) • The order of service in an early church meeting (14:26-33a) • Women should remain under authority in the church (14:33b-36) • This teaching is the Lord's command (14:37-38) • Summary on tongues / prophesy / orderliness (14:39-40) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus leads a time of teaching and prayer: • Vine/branches discourse (John 15 1-17) • The World's hatred / promise of the Holy Spirit (John 15:18-16:18) • Jesus tells about how he reveals the Father; overcomes the world (John 16:19-33) • High priestly prayer (John 17) • Jesus tells them to get money bag, traveling bag, cloak, swords (Luke 22:21-38)

When we line up the topics covered by Paul next to those covered by Jesus during the Last Supper, one thing

immediately jumps out at us: both Jesus and Paul used a *similar sequence* of events.

The difference between the two is that the Last Supper was an actual full meal followed by a time of teaching led by Jesus, the head of the spiritual household of faith. Paul, on the other hand, instructs the Corinthians in *how to continue having a gathering of this sort*—a full meal together that honors Jesus, followed by a time of teaching where Jesus, the Head, still gets to lead via the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Is this correspondance a coincidence?

This servant of the Lord finds it hard to believe that this is a coincidence. It seems that Paul intentionally followed the form that Jesus had initiated when he had said, “*do this in remembrance of me.*” And if that weren't enough, Paul ends his teaching with the following:

14:37 If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord’s command. 14:38 If someone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (NET)

3.2. Conclusion

Jesus had a full meal with the disciples during which he shared the bread and fruit of the vine. Paul told the Corinthians how to hold a full meal in honor of Jesus that includes sharing the bread and the fruit of the vine.

After supper, Jesus poured each disciple a second helping of the fruit of the vine, forshadowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit enabling each disciple to hear him individually. Then he gave a teaching to the entire body of disciples. Similarly, Paul described how Jesus, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in love, desires to speak through each individual in a particular way, so that when put together, the entire Body would be able to hear and understand Jesus teaching them.

These two things were the essential ingredients for Jesus. And they were the essential ingredients for Paul. For Jesus, having these things was *both necessary and also sufficient*. The same was true for Paul.

Part II. Luke/Acts

Luke/Acts chronicles the start of the Church. Both are written to “Theophilus”, who might have been a real man but whose name means “lover of God”. The purpose in Luke's Gospel is “so that you may know for certain the things you were taught.”

Luke's Gospel is the story of Jesus's life in the flesh, from the sign of John the Baptist (whose job was to prepare the way for Jesus to come the first time), until Jesus himself was raised from the dead and taken into heaven.

The thrust of Acts is the story of Jesus' life through the *church*, (whose job is to prepare the way for Jesus to return) until the Body of Christ brought the Gospel all the way to Rome, and even to the very palace of the emperor.

This series studies through Luke/Acts, asking the question, What is the Holy Spirit trying to tell us about God's plan for the Church to multiply?

- Chapter 4, *For your prayer has been heard* — After Luke's prolog, he starts his Gospel with a lesson on prayer. In this story, Zechariah illustrates how God takes the small, imperfect things that we offer and makes them into much more--far more than we could imagine. And he transforms our lives and the lives of others around us in the process.

4. For your prayer has been heard

Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.

--Luke 1:13

During the time of Zechariah, the spiritual situation in Israel was dire. Their promised Messiah was about to come and the people were not ready to receive him.

The religious leaders knew the Bible better than any of their forefathers. They had large parts of their Bible memorized. Some had memorized the whole thing. They had analyzed tiny details of the Bible's grammar in its original language for its minute flavors of meaning. They were very zealous for the traditions that had been handed down to them.

But when the wise men came looking for Jesus, following the star, none of Bible scholars of the day could be bothered to follow up on the wise men's report that their Messiah had been born, even though they knew from the Scriptures where he would be found. Although all of the signs that their Messiah was about to come had already been fulfilled, most had stopped watching and waiting for his appearing.

Except for a tiny minority (Simeon, Anna), the people had also forgotten how to hear God's voice and to walk in *relationship* with him.

They didn't really *know God*. They just knew *about him*.

The result was that they had replaced the loving, caring, family relationship that God had intended for his people to have with him with mere human knowledge and religious ritual.

This situation was a great difficulty for the people of Israel. Because, they knew about God, but they didn't *know him*, how would they recognize God in human form? Again, how would they recognize him when he humbled himself, taking the form of a man, and became obedient even to death on the cross?

But God had a plan.

4.1. God chose Zechariah to help solve this problem

Zechariah was priest to God in the middle of this culture. Unlike most in his culture, he still believed--in his mind at least--that God could still speak and could still work miracles. And he was praying for a miracle: a son, even though he and his wife were too old to have children.

Zechariah had entered the temple to burn incense. Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4 identify incense as a symbol of the prayers of God's people.

Zechariah had entered the temple to pray instead of another priest because the Lord had revealed for him to do so through casting lots "*according to the custom of the priesthood*" (v8).

And Zechariah was about to find out, in the most dramatic way possible, that he had been praying in God's will.

God sent an angel to meet Zechariah in that place and to deliver the message of God's promise of an answer.

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.”

4.2. The answer

The answer that God had promised was far beyond what Zechariah had asked.

Zechariah had just asked for a child. And God had provided much more than any child. God promised a son who would carry Israel's spiritual inheritance forward. Who would turn Israel's hearts back to a *relationship with God*. They needed to be prepared because they were living in the time just before Jesus, Immanuel, God With Us was about to come.

Naturally, the Lord was concerned with the material blessing. A flesh-and-blood son would carry forward Zechariah's family inheritance and take away his social stigma from being childless.

But the Lord was far more concerned with who this son would be spiritually:

- What would he do?
- How would he live?
- What would his life mean?
- What spiritual inheritance, what spiritual legacy would he leave?

This entire experience of having no son had been a great difficulty for Zechariah. But God was about to turn Zechariah's difficulty into an answer for all of God's people's needs.

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.”

4.3. Forerunner before the Lord

John's spiritual legacy was to be the forerunner before Jesus, to *“make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.”*

They needed their hearts prepared so that when Jesus came, as many as possible would be ready to believe him, to receive his word, and to follow him. This had two parts:

Zechariah's child had to be prepared to deliver God's message

Before God could use John to turn other peoples' hearts to God, John's own heart had to belong to God. But God had promised Zechariah a special provision. His son would:

- Be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from before birth
- Avoid wine or strong drink. In this context, wine is a symbol of being addicted to this world's pleasures.
- Be great in the *sight of the Lord* (as opposed to the sight of man)

These were the qualifications that God was going to give John the Baptist to enable him to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.

This was an (humanly) impossible task

This was an impossible task, both for Zechariah and for John.

Zechariah had aged, both physically and spiritually.

Physically, he and his wife were too old to have children. And he had aged spiritually also. Although his mind still believed in a living God who hears his people and works miracles, his heart had stopped believing. Both of these difficulties needed addressing, and humanly speaking, both are impossible to address.

But what is impossible for man is possible for God. God was about to do two miracles for Zechariah:

- To give Zechariah a physical son. To answer Zechariah's immediate prayer.
- But more than that, God was about to change Zechariah's heart. Zechariah would no longer have a spiritually aged heart of unbelief but would have a fresh, young, vibrant heart of faith, full of the Holy Spirit. This was God's provision for Zechariah to be able to raise John in a manner so that John could fulfill the prophesies about him.

Having a baby is one thing. Bringing a baby home is another thing. But raising a baby into an adult who walks with God and chooses God's ways over man's ways is an even greater miracle. Having a child who would grow up to be like John the Baptist is one of the greatest miracles of all.

As a result, through Zechariah--through Zechariah's prayers--God was going to prepare his people for Jesus to come.

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard."

4.4. Your prayer has been heard

Today, we live near the end of church history. The institutional Western church has aged and is no longer producing spiritual children able to transform our culture. Institutional church attendance is declining and peoples' hearts are growing progressively colder.

The dominant Christian culture elevates Bible teachers who are trained in a certain way above all of the people. These teachers memorize large parts of the Bible and study the minute details of the original language for its shades of meaning.

A result is that people have a lot of head knowledge about God, but few *know God in a healthy, family-style, intimate love relationship*. (Only this kind of *love relationship* with God is a proper motive to study the Bible that way.)

We, too, live in the time immediately before Jesus is about to come; the Lord is again calling to himself a people prepared for him.

You will have a child

We too have an impossible task: Like Zechariah, the Lord has called *us* to bear and raise spiritual children. Spiritual

children who, like John the Baptist:

- Will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from (before) their spiritual birth
- Will not drink the wine of this world's pleasures
- Will be great in the *sight of the Lord* (as opposed to the sight of man)
- Will continue the task of turning many more of God's chosen people to the Lord their God
- Will go as *forerunner before the Lord...to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him*

He has called us to do this because, just as in Zechariah's day, Jesus is about to come.

We cannot do this task in our own ability. It is a humanly impossible task both to bear spiritual children, and to raise them to spiritual maturity so that they fulfill these things.

Just like Zechariah, we can only pray that God would give us these children. And like Zechariah, it is through prayer that these spiritual children are brought to maturity.

And like Zechariah, the Lord sends his angel to announce that our prayers are according to God's will. That the Lord will provide, just as he said.

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.”