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COME TO THE TABLE

Luke 22:7-23

By

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April 9, 2000

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Luke Lesson 99

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In my office I have a number of photographs of my family. If you were to ask me, "Are those pictures there because you can't remember what they look like?" I would answer, "No, those pictures are not there to inform my intellect. They are there to touch my heart." When I look at those pictures during the day, they remind me of my loved ones from whom I am temporarily separated. I think about what each of them means to me. My heart is touched as I recall fond times we've had together. I'm moved to thank God for giving them to me and to pray for His ongoing protection and grace in their lives at that moment. I long to be reunited with them, to feel their hugs and kisses, and to enjoy their company. The value of a picture is emotional. It touches our hearts.

The Lord Jesus left us a snapshot of Himself for us to remember Him by. We should pause and look at it often. When we do, it should remind us of His great love for us as shown supremely on the cross. It should fill our hearts with the desire to see Him when He comes again. It should make us look to ourselves to ask, "Am I ready to meet Him? Is there anything in my life that needs to be dealt with before I meet my Bridegroom face to face?" It should touch our hearts and make us say, "Thank God for what He has given us in Christ!" That snapshot is the Lord's Supper. Our text is Luke's account of this most important meal in history. I want us to see from it how we should come to the Lord's Table.

As you know, we celebrate the Lord's Supper often. If we didn't have two services, with the time crunch of getting the first one over by a certain time, I would urge us to have the Lord's Supper each week. Some feel that a weekly observance is too frequent and runs the risk of making the Lord's Supper into a meaningless ritual. But many Christians from many different backgrounds—John Calvin in the Reformed tradition, Charles Spurgeon the Baptist, the Anglican church, Plymouth Brethren churches, and others—have observed the Lord's Supper weekly. The church in Acts seemed to gather weekly "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Of course anything you do repeatedly runs the risk of becoming a meaningless ritual—singing familiar songs, prayer, Bible reading, or

singing familiar songs, prayer, Bible reading, or whatever. But the solution isn't to do those things less frequently, but to deal with the problems that cause our hearts to grow cold. If you neglect coming to the Lord's Supper, I believe you're missing one of the keys to spiritual health.

So I want to show you how to come to this important ordinance or sacrament ordained by our Lord. Webster defines a sacrament as "a formal religious act that is sacred as a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality." Augustine said that it is an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter Elwell, [Baker], p. 965).

When we come to the Lord's Supper, we should first look to ourselves and then look to Christ.

1. When we come to the Lord's Supper, we should look to ourselves.

As the Lord and the disciples met for this final evening together before the crucifixion, He dropped a bombshell in the middle of the supper which stunned the disciples: "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table" (22:21). It was unthinkable! They knew that the Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus. But one of the twelve? One sitting there that moment, eating the Passover with Jesus? How could this be?

Luke records how this news led them into a silly dispute about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:21-24). But before that controversy broke out, Mark 14:19 records that the disciples did something a bit uncharacteristic, but right: Each one questioned his own allegiance to Christ by asking, "Surely, not I?" Matthew informs us that even Judas asked the question (Matt. 26:25). In the case of the eleven, it was a sincere question that reflected their lack of confidence in their own spiritual strength. In Judas' case, it was a hypocritical attempt to cover his deceit. But it's significant that nobody said, "It must be Judas!" Instead, each one looked soberly within and asked, "Lord, is it I?"

In 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, the apostle Paul tells us that each person should examine himself before he partakes of the elements of the Supper. He warns that if we do not do this, we eat and drink judgment unto ourselves, by which he means discipline from

the Lord that can include physical illness and even death. There are several areas where we should examine ourselves:

A. We should examine our attitudes.

Jesus began the Supper by giving thanks (22:17). The Greek word is transliterated Eucharist. Jesus gave thanks for the cup and then passed it among the disciples. Some versions, based on a manuscript variant, omit the last half of verse 19 and all of verse 20, so that Luke simply has the cup and then the bread (reversed from the order in Matthew, Mark, and 1 Corinthians). But the best reading is to include these verses, so that there was the cup, the bread, and then the cup.

In the Jewish Passover, there were four cups (some say three) during the meal. Luke records probably the first and third cups. The first cup was accompanied by the prayer, "Blessed are You, Yahweh our God, who has created the fruit of the vine." It was a prayer of thanksgiving for God's provision and salvation, as pictured in all that followed. Jesus introduced it by saying, for the second time, that this would be the last time He would partake of this celebration until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. The second cup followed the explanation for why the day was celebrated and the singing of Hallel Psalms. Then came the meal itself. Jesus gave thanks again for the bread, and here He reinterpreted the elements of the Passover by showing that they pointed toward His impending death. He instructed them that in the future, they should do this in remembrance of Him.

The third cup, the cup of blessing, followed the main course. "In the same way" means that He also gave thanks for the cup. Here Jesus explained that this cup symbolized the new covenant in His blood, poured out for you. The final cup, not recorded in the New Testament accounts, was drunk in connection with the singing of the final Hallel Psalms.

To come back to the point, this commemorative meal that Jesus here transformed was marked by thanksgiving (repeatedly offered) and joy (symbolized by the fruit of the vine). The Passover was a time to give thanks to God for His great deliverance in the Exodus. The Lord's Supper is a time for us to thank God for His great salvation provided for us in the death of Christ and to rejoice

in His grace so freely given. It should also be a time of hope, since Jesus twice mentions His coming kingdom, which could not have come unless He was resurrected from the dead.

Thus when we come to the Lord's Table, we need to examine our attitudes. Are we people of thankfulness, joy, and hope, or are we grumblers marked by gloom and despair? John Piper is right in saying, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Thus one of the main ways that we glorify God with our lives is by enjoying Him and the blessings of His salvation. If your life is marked by grumbling, depression, and despair, you need to judge your attitudes and focus on God's gracious salvation.

B. We should examine our actions.

Jesus shocked the disciples by announcing that the hand of the one betraying Him was on the table. To share a meal with someone in that culture was an act of friendship and loyalty. To betray one with whom you had eaten was a terrible thing, let alone to betray the Lord Jesus. Not just Judas, but also the rest of the twelve would shortly abandon Jesus in their confusion and fear.

I hope that none of us are in danger of betraying the Savior, although it is possible. None of us can say that we are immune from such a terrible sin. But like the apostles, we all are prone to selfish, sinful behavior. Like them, we are prone to the pride that led them into an argument about which of them was the greatest. The Lord's Supper is a time for us to pause and examine our actions over the past week. Is there any selfish or prideful thing we have done that we have not yet confessed? Did we dishonor the Savior by any of our actions?

If your answer is "yes," you are not to abstain from participation in the Lord's Supper. Rather, Paul instructs us to examine ourselves and *then to partake* (1 Cor. 11:28). In other words, if the Spirit convicts you of some sin that you have not confessed, bring it to Him and obtain His forgiveness and mercy. *Then* partake. There is forgiveness available for every sin in the blood of Christ. Come to Him in repentance and He will pardon you and make you clean. Examine your actions.

C. We should examine our affections.

Jesus told the twelve, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (22:15). He used a Hebrew expression that is literally, "I have desired with desire." It refers to a strong inner desire on Jesus' part to share with these men whom He loved to the uttermost (John 13:1). His great love would shortly lead the spotless Son of God to the worst possible suffering He could endure, to be made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21). There is no greater love in the universe than the love that led the Savior to offer Himself as the penalty for our sins!

The Lord's Supper is a time to examine our affections. Has my heart been right before God? Have I lived each day "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20)? Did His great love motivate me to turn away from sin, to deny myself in service for Him, and to be filled with praise and gratitude for His great salvation? Did His sacrificial love prompt me to ask forgiveness of each member of my family and of the family of God whom I may have offended?

In a sermon on the Lord's Supper, Spurgeon mentions a Mrs. Toogood, who is described in Rowland Hill's *Village Dialogues*. She made a mistake about the week that communion was to be observed, so she did not play cards during that week, and kept herself wonderfully pure. On Sunday when she found that she had made a blunder as to the time, she said she had wasted the whole week in getting ready! That should *not* be our attitude about forsaking sin! Rather, out of love for the Savior who gave Himself for me on the cross and who earnestly desires to fellowship with me, I should gladly forsake all sin so as to be ready to come to His table. When I come to that table, I should first look to myself. Examine my attitude; examine my actions; examine my affections.

2. When we come to the Lord's Supper, we should look to Christ.

If we look to ourselves for too long, we would despair. Someone has wisely said, "For every look at yourself, take two looks at Christ." In fact, the point of looking to ourselves is to make us despair so that we don't trust in our own righteousness to commend us to God. But then, as we see the sinfulness of our own hearts, we should be driven to cling to Christ and His death

on the cross for us. He alone is our hope and salvation. Note four things about our Savior:

- A. Look to Christ who sovereignly laid down His life of His own accord.

The theme of 22:7-13 is Christ's control over the circumstances of His impending death. We don't know for sure whether Jesus had prearranged these preparations for the room for the supper or whether He knew these things supernaturally. I think that He prearranged the details in this secretive way so that Judas would not learn the location of the supper and thus thwart what the Lord wanted to accomplish that evening. Both the Lord's Supper and the "Upper Room Discourse" (John 13-17), which contains so much important teaching, took place that night. Thus Jesus arranged for a male servant to carry a water jug (something only women normally did) as a sign to direct Peter and John to this unnamed man who allowed them to use the upper room.

Also, Jesus was in control over His betrayal, as verse 22 emphasizes: "the Son of Man is going as it has been determined." Judas surprised the eleven, but he didn't surprise Jesus. In fact, as early as the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus announced that one of the twelve would betray Him (John 6:70-71). Scripture goes out of its way to show that Christ was not foiled in His attempt to set up His kingdom by Judas' betrayal and by the plots of the Jewish leaders. They were responsible for their horrible sin, and yet they fulfilled God's predetermined plan (Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28).

Jesus testified, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:17-18). His death on the cross was no accident. Evil men didn't temporarily get the upper hand on God. Christ's death was a part of God's decree before the foundation of the world. We can take comfort that it was because He loved us as His sheep that He voluntarily laid down His life for us (John 10:11). The Lord's Supper should cause us to marvel at God's sovereign grace!

- B. Look to Christ who knows our hearts.

Jesus knew what was in Judas' heart. As we'll see in 22:31-34, He knew Peter's heart. Nothing is hidden from His sight. We're fools if, like Judas, we try to cover our sin from Him by hypocritically saying, "Is it I?" When we come to His table, knowing that He knows everything in our hearts, we should readily confess it all to Him. He is more than ready to forgive and restore us.

- C. Look to Christ whose sacrificial death is the heart of the Christian faith.

The central event of the Old Testament was the exodus, when God miraculously delivered His people from bondage to Egypt. The Passover celebrated and rehearsed that event for each generation. The exodus was a type of what Christ would do in delivering His people from bondage to sin through His death on the cross. The Lord's Supper replaces the Passover in celebrating and rehearsing the central event of all history, the cross, so that it remains at the center of our faith and thinking.

When Jesus gave bread to His disciples and said, "This is My body," none of them understood Him to mean that it literally became His body, as the Catholic Church teaches. He was still there bodily in the room. They understood that He meant that the bread *represents* His body. It reminds us that the eternal Son of God took on a human body, lived a sinless life in that body (unleavened bread pictures His sinlessness), and that He bore our sins in that body when He died on the cross.

The cup containing the wine points to the shed blood of Christ, the true Passover Lamb. Just as the angel of death passed over every Israeli home where the blood had been applied to the doorposts, so now everyone who has by faith applied the blood of Christ to his or her guilty conscience will be safe from the wrath to come. Matthew 26:27 records Jesus as saying, "Drink from it, all of you" (see also Mark 14:23). The Bible nowhere tells us that only a special class of believers called priests are to drink from the cup. Every believer should partake of the bread and the cup.

Furthermore, Christ says, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (22:20). Just as the old covenant was instituted by a blood sacrifice, so the new. The word "covenant" does not refer to an agreement between two equals,

but to an arrangement established by one party (God). The other party (man) cannot alter it; he can only accept or reject it. As the writer of Hebrews makes clear, a primary meaning of the new covenant is that God has once and for all forgiven our sins through the death of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is *not* a sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, as in the Roman Catholic Mass. Hebrews 10:12 states that Christ "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time." The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's one sacrifice that inaugurated the new covenant as the basis of our forgiveness and relationship with God. The covenant aspect reminds us that God will keep His promise. It's a done deal!

The death of Jesus Christ on our behalf should be the focus of our daily walk with God. Christ and Him crucified is the center of the Christian faith. If we meditate properly on the cross, we will grow in humility; we will be filled with joy and gratitude; we will be bound to our Savior in love; and we will turn from the sin which so easily entangles us. Look daily to Christ and Him crucified!

D. Look to Christ whose resurrection and promised return assure us of the efficacy of His death.

Jesus solemnly assures the disciples that He will not eat the Passover meal or drink of the fruit of the vine again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom (22:16, 18). There is debate about whether or not the Passover will again be celebrated in the millennial kingdom. It could refer to the future celebration of Lord's Supper as the fulfillment of the Passover. But whatever He meant, Jesus here predicted His resurrection and His coming again in power and glory to establish His kingdom. I cannot see how Jesus' present reign in the hearts of believers could be the final fulfillment of His kingdom. He pointed ahead to the day when His kingdom will be established on earth. Because He was raised from the dead and because we know that He is coming again, we can know that His death accomplished all that He promised. As Paul put it, "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Conclusion

If your heart is a bit cold toward the Savior, maybe you have not been looking at His picture as frequently or as carefully as you

should. Come to His table. Look to yourself—your attitudes, actions, and affections. Confess any apathy that has made the Lord's Supper a routine ritual. Turn from any sins that keep you from close fellowship with the Savior. Then look to Christ who freely gave Himself for you and let your heart be moved by His great love as seen in the cross.

Discussion Questions

1. When does looking to ourselves go too far? How much introspection is healthy?
2. Is it spiritually and emotionally healthy to think often of our own depravity? Why/why not?
3. Discuss the implications: The cross should be at the center of our spiritual lives.
4. Someone argues, "If God is totally sovereign, then people are just robots with no free will." Your response?

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