

“The First Communion”

June 6, 2021

Luke 22:14-20

I. Introduction

In [Deuteronomy 16:16](#) Moses wrote, “**Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles.**” For this reason, the number of people gathered in Jerusalem for Passover would be enormous. The historian Josephus wrote that in A.D. 40 over 250,000 lambs were killed at Passover. Since tradition required that there must be a minimum of 10 people per lamb, this meant that Jerusalem—a town of normally 500,000 people—would have over 2.5 million people in it.

[Galatians 4:4](#) says, “**When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.**” Since Jesus, as well as His disciples, was “**under the law,**” they were all in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover as commanded. As we saw last week, Jesus had sent Peter and John to “**make preparations for us to eat the Passover**” ([Luke 21:8](#)) in an undisclosed place so that Judas couldn’t alert the authorities. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the beginning of the eight-day-long celebration of Passover. Unbeknownst to the disciples, it was also the night before Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion. This was the final gathering before His death; He would be arrested later that evening after the Passover meal. Luke’s record of that evening in the upper room began with a painful reminder of Jesus’ suffering.

II. In the Upper Room

A. A Painful Reminder Sometime after 6 o’clock Thursday evening, Jesus arrived with the disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. (Since Galilean Jews determined a day as an evening followed with a morning, it was actually Friday evening for Jesus and the disciples.) Jesus, as the Host of the supper, would have greeted each one of them with the traditional kiss of peace—He would have kissed Judas, the betrayer, as well. Then “**Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.**” It seems from [John 13:23-26](#) that John, “**the disciple Jesus loved,**” was on one side of Jesus and Judas was most likely in the place of honor on the other side of Jesus.

As they reclined around the table, the disciples must have been surprised when Jesus said, “**I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**” The meal was to be a time of celebration and Jesus was talking about suffering. Jesus had talked about suffering before—turn to Luke 9:18-22. Later in Luke 12:50 (NET) Jesus said, “**I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is finished!**” Jesus knew His time had come; as He had told Nicodemus in John 3:14-15, it was time for “**the Son of Man to be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.**”

Jesus’ next statement, “**For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God,**” indicated that this was the final Passover of His earthly life. For that matter, there would be no more Passovers on God’s calendar at all. The next celebration would be the great kingdom feast when Jesus returns to establish His rule on the earth. Knowing the rest of the story, Jesus saw beyond the suffering to the glory; beyond the cross to the crown; as Hebrews 12:2 says, “**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**” Although they didn’t realize it at the time, Jesus’ reference to His kingdom would assure His disciples (and all Christians) that His death was not the end of the story. He would rise and return to establish His promised kingdom in which His true followers will join with Him. But the disciples probably didn’t hear anything after He said, “*Suffering.*”

B. The Passover Meal Jesus’ “**taking the cup**” and giving “**thanks**” marked the beginning of the Passover meal. There were several stages in the Passover celebration, spread out over a period of hours and intermixed with conversation and symbolic food items. The meal opened with a prayer thanking God for His preservation, deliverance, protection, goodness, and blessing. Then came the first of four cups of red wine. Wine was always mixed with water before drinking, but during Passover it was diluted with a double amount of water, lest anyone should become drunk at this holy occasion. Luke wrote that after taking the first cup, called the *cup of blessing*, Jesus again gave thanks. Once again, He hinted to the disciples that this Passover meal was going to be different—He said, “**For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.**”

Since this meal reminded the Jews of God's deliverance from physical bondage to Egypt and spiritual bondage to sin, the next thing to happen was a ceremonial washing of the hands. This represented the need for moral and spiritual cleansing; being released from bondage. It was probably at this point that the disciples began arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. In response [John 13:3-17](#) says that Jesus washed their feet and taught them concerning humility.

The next part of the Passover meal was the eating of bitter herbs, symbolic of the bitter bondage their forefathers had endured in Egypt. These herbs and pieces of unleavened bread were dipped into a paste of finely ground apples, dates, pomegranates, and nuts which were symbolic of the mud and clay used in making bricks for the Egyptians. This was followed by the participants singing or reciting [Psalms 113 and 114](#), the first of two of the Hallel or Praise Psalms—[Psalms 113-118](#).

Then the second cup of wine was drunk. At this time, the head of the household, in this case Jesus, would explain the meaning of Passover. After the story and meaning of Passover came the main meal, consisting of the roasted sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread. The head of the household would again wash his hands and then break off pieces of unleavened bread and hand them out to be eaten with the lamb. After that they would drink the third cup of wine. The ceremony closed with the singing of the remainder of the Hallel Psalms ([115-118](#)), and the drinking of the fourth cup of wine.

C. A New Covenant The Passover Jesus was celebrating with the disciples was the last Passover. Jesus ended the Passover and instituted a new memorial; a new covenant. It would not look back to a lamb in Egypt as the symbol of God's redeeming love and power, but to the very Lamb of God, who by the sacrificial shedding of His own blood, took away the sins of the whole world. In that one Passover meal Jesus terminated the Old Covenant and inaugurated a New Covenant.

Jesus took two elements from the Passover feast to picture His own death. Perhaps it was during the meal itself that Jesus “[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.’](#)” The broken bread pictured His body given for the sins of the world. The fact that He broke the bread does not symbolize that His bones were broken but

that He allowed His body to be controlled and abused by the soldiers as they beat Him, nailed Him to the cross and pierced His side with a spear. Originally, unleavened bread symbolized severance from the old way of life in Egypt and sin. Now the bread represents Christ's own sinless body sacrificed for the salvation of men. When Jesus said, “**This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me,**” He was instituting a memorial of His sacrificial death for His followers to observe.

In saying the bread “**is my body,**” Jesus obviously wasn’t speaking literally. He was still standing before them—nothing had changed. Eating His body was no more literal than His saying that He is a door in **John 10:9**, a vine in **John 15:1**, or bread in **John 6:35**. The bread hadn’t turned into His flesh. It was only a symbol of His body. It was still unleavened bread.

“**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.’**” Jesus then took the 3rd cup of wine and said that it symbolized His blood—His atoning death—the giving of His pure and spotless life for the corrupt, wholly sinful lives of unsaved man. **Hebrews 9:22** says, “**In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**” Jesus’ shed blood established a New Covenant—a new relationship; a reconciliation—between God and man. The Old Covenant was meant for the Jews, the New Covenant is meant for all. Jesus’ blood made atonement or paid the penalty for the sins of all mankind, Gentile as well as Jew. His death and resurrection can reconcile all who believe with God.

Although they didn’t know it at the time, Jesus’ promise to celebrate with the disciples in the future kingdom was another assurance to them of His return after His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Lord’s Supper isn’t only a reminder of our Lord’s sacrifice for sins but also a reminder of His promise to return and share His kingdom blessings. At the end of this present age, we will gather with all His disciples and share this supper in celebration with Him.

The hymn that Jesus and His disciples sang before they left the Upper Room would have included the last psalm of the Hallel, Psalm 118. [Turn to Psalm 118:1-9.](#) Imagine Jesus being able to sing praises to God in the face of His coming rejection, suffering, and death.

V. Conclusion

The Passover Jesus celebrated with the disciples was the last divinely sanctioned Passover ever to be celebrated. It was also the first Lord's Supper or Communion. With Jesus' death and resurrection, the Old Covenant and observance have been replaced by a New Covenant and a new observance.

Paraphrasing [2 Corinthians 5:17](#): “the old has gone, the new has come.”

Now the Lord's Supper—Communion—is a memorial to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the sins of those who accept His gift of eternal life. It's a time to look backward at Jesus' sacrifice for each one of us. Communion is also a time to look forward. Jesus didn't remain in the tomb. He rose again and as the angels said in [Acts 1:11](#), “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Then we will be with Him and will celebrate the Lord's Supper with our Savior and Lord in person—[Revelation 19:9](#) says, “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’” The Lord's Table is a time to look forward to Jesus' return for us. In [1 Cor. 11:28](#) we are told that the Lord's Supper is also a time to look inward—it is a time of self-examination and holding oneself accountable before God for what he or she does and doesn't do. Like Judas and Peter, we all need to watch out that we don't fall; that we don't follow the leading of the devil.

Finally, as we remember and celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that in the past, the present, and the future God loves us and will be with us in all we do and say. No one walks alone. As Jesus said in [Matthew 28:20](#), “Surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Let me close with the last 2 verses of the Hallel—[Psalm 118:28-29](#). Listen to these words of praise: “*You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*”