

The Provision of the Lord's Supper
Matthew 26:26-29
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

Matthew 26:26-29 continues the narrative of the final Passover of Jesus' life (26:20-29). It occurs while Jesus and His disciples eat the Passover meal. This narrative account can also be found in the other synoptic Gospels (Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20), but is not found in the Gospel of John.

Matthew and Mark place the announcement of Jesus' betrayal (Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:18-21) before the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25), while Luke places the announcement of the betrayal (Luke 22:21-23) after the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:17-20). Most view Matthew and Mark as giving the chronological account and that Luke combines them into a single description because it would appear much less likely that Judas would be present for the Lord's Supper.

Paul also referenced the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"* Paul's account more closely follows what Luke recorded, while Mark and Matthew are very similar in their respective narratives.

There is ample desire on the part of commentators who examine these passages to seek after the exact words that Jesus spoke to His disciples. This is due to the liturgical nature of these words as used by churches through today in their practice of the Lord's Supper. Of course, since Aramaic was the spoken language of the people of both Galilee and Judea, we can be confident that Jesus said these words originally in Aramaic, not in Greek. Therefore, the Gospels and Paul simply translate the exact words of Jesus in order to achieve the meaning of what He said. So then, there is no exact original text in Aramaic of the words that Jesus spoke, but there are multiple witnesses (all eleven disciples), to what He did say. Matthew was present at this meal, and Mark, Luke and Paul were closely associated with those who were present. We know what He said, but having to repeat His exact words is unnecessary.

The partaking of the bread (26:26)

The introductory phrase, “*While they were eating,*” begins the next phase of this supper that Matthew records. Because Matthew and Mark include this chronological delineator, we can know that this institution of the Lord’s Supper by Jesus followed after the revelation of His betrayal. While Luke places the words of the Lord’s Supper before the words of the betrayal (Luke 22:14-22), He does not include any time clarifiers and therefore combines the Lord’s Supper with the revelation of the betrayal into one event. It would fit with Judas being present during Jesus’ telling of His betrayal, but then would have departed before the Lord’s Supper would be instituted.

While the bread was involved in the Passover, along with the giving of a blessing, the words “*Take, eat, this is My body*” were not part of the Passover meal. These words were instituted by Jesus in the inauguration of the Lord’s Supper. The phrase “*this is My body*” has been taken in four different meanings:

1. Roman Catholics, along with the Eastern Orthodox Church, and other such orthodox churches view this as meaning the literal body of Jesus. That is, the bread becomes the literal body of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. This view is known as Transubstantiation. Obviously, Jesus’ actual body was distinct from the unleavened bread and none of the disciples would have possibly considered the bread to be His actual body.
2. Lutherans view this in a slightly different way, where the bread is the body of Christ in that He is truly present “in, with, and under” the elements. This view suggests that Jesus truly is present in the bread, but not in an actual physical way. This is known as Consubstantiation. Similarly, there is no indication that the disciples thought that Jesus meant that He became present in the bread.
3. Presbyterians and those who closely follow the reformed theology of John Calvin reject the idea that the bread contains the physical presence of Jesus, but still view that Jesus resides in the elements spiritually. As with the first two views, they also view that God delivers special grace through the partaking of the elements.
4. Most evangelicals today view “*this is My body*” as symbolic, as representing Christ. As such, the elements of the Lord’s Supper are reminders of the death of Christ for our sin, as Jesus taught, “*This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:24).

Many evangelical Christians will call the Lord's Supper a "sacrament," as they also do with baptism. By this they mean that God imparts a special grace through the participation in them. This means that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, by which the participant is ministered to in a direct way, a spiritual feeding in which the person receives Christ and is therefore blessed. Therefore, the elements and the ceremony are both viewed as sacred and holy in and of themselves, bringing special grace to all who partake.

A better term than many other evangelical Christians use is "ordinance," as this was ordained by Christ and is to be done in obedience to Christ. It is not to receive a supposed mystical blessing. Ordinance is an important word and helps to clarify the meaning of the communion. An ordinance is an outward rite prescribed by Christ to be performed by His church. As an ordinance, it does not bring special grace in and of itself. While this may seem like merely semantics, it is important to recognize the purpose of the Lord's Supper. We are to "*do this in remembrance of Me*" (1 Corinthians 11:24), as a memorial to Christ.

Jesus often used some imagery to communicate spiritual truth about Himself, such as "*I am the bread of life*" (John 6:48), "*I am the door*" (John 10:9), and "*I am the vine*" (John 15:5). It should not surprise us to see Him use the imagery of the bread that He broke to symbolize His body, which would be given for His disciples. In just a few hours, His body would be sacrificed for their sin and the sin of the world. There is no reason to insert some sort of mystical meaning into these words of Jesus.

When Jesus broke the bread in Matthew 26:26, He said that it represented His body. He did not say that the bread was being broken for them. It was broken in order to distribute it to each of the disciples. Indeed, there is no place in the Scripture that says that Jesus' body was broken for us, for we know later that His body would not be broken, "*but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs....For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.'*" (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46).

The reason that people will say that His body was broken for us is that the King James Version used a late and minority textual variant to translate 1 Corinthians 11:24 as "*Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*" This translation is so poorly attested to by extant Greek manuscripts that we can be certain that the correct translation is "*This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.*" This is another instance of inaccurate jargon continuing to be passed along without a biblical basis.

Nevertheless, Jesus would willingly give up His body for our sin, *“and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world”* (1 John 2:2). His atoning sacrifice that would happen in the hours to come would be given and whenever we eat of the Lord’s Supper, we remember this sacrifice. Jesus ordained our remembrance of Him and according to 1 Corinthians 11:26, *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”* This is an ordinance that we participate simply in obedience to Christ.

The partaking of the wine (26:27)

Unlike Mark 14:23, which only says that the disciples *“all drank from”* the cup, Matthew describes Christ’s directive to them, *“Drink from it, all of you.”* This supports the establishment of the Lord’s Supper in this verse as it is not simply what they did. As recorded by Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25, the emphasis is upon what Christ did, not what the disciples did.

This command to drink is prefaced in Matthew by *“when He had taken a cup and given thanks.”* While both Matthew and Mark’s Gospel say that Jesus gave thanks when He had taken a cup, Luke 22:19 specifies that He gave thanks after taking the bread as well. So a prayer of thankfulness was involved with the bread and the cup.

Thankfulness was a part of the entire supper, as this was a part of the Passover meal that Jesus and His disciples had experienced their entire life. In the Passover meal, there was a blessing of thanksgiving performed before eating the unleavened bread, and after the meal, there was the “cup of blessing” where another prayer of thanksgiving was given. The prayer was known as “berakhah” and was “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” Therefore, this giving of thanks was an established part of the Passover meal. So then, this is not necessarily a formula for every meal we eat, although praying always is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:17), but it was directly related to the Passover meal itself.

The Greek word EUCHARISTESAS (“had given thanks”) is where we get the English word “Eucharist,” which is the term the Catholic Church uses for the Lord’s Supper. This term ought not to concern us, since it is merely a transliteration for the Greek word for thanksgiving. However, what is objectionable is the meaning that Catholicism puts into what they have termed the “Eucharist”, where the church considers this to be the literal body and blood of Christ, taken to impart grace to the partaker.

The promise of forgiveness (26:28)

In Matthew 26:28, Jesus gives the purpose of His pending death, *“for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”* The reference to His blood clearly depicts the gruesome nature of His crucifixion. His blood is said to be *“of the covenant,”* which is how Old Testament covenants were ratified (validated). The Mosaic Covenant was ratified with the shedding of blood, as Moses said in Exodus 24:8, *“Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you”* and the Abrahamic Covenant was also ratified by death (Genesis 15:9-10).

This covenant that Jesus spoke of is the New Covenant that God would make with the Jews, *“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”* While the best Greek manuscripts do not include the adjective “new” in Matthew 26:28, Luke 22:20 makes it clear that Jesus spoke specifically of the New Covenant, *“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”* 1 Corinthians 11:25 further affirms that Jesus spoke of the New Covenant, *“He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood.’”*

Jesus’ words, *“which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins,”* reflect the words of Jeremiah 31:34, *“for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”* This is the climactic part of the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah. This purpose for His death is what Jesus meant by “this is My blood of the covenant” since the cup was not His actual blood, but it represented His death, which inaugurated the New Covenant, including the *“forgiveness of sins.”*

The New Covenant is a theme of the New Testament. We are *“servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2 Corinthians 3:6). Hebrews 8-10 deals with the New Covenant extensively and Hebrews 12:24 says that Jesus is *“the mediator of a new covenant.”*

The Lord's Supper is the sign of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20), just as the Sabbath day was the sign of the old covenant, "*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, "You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations"'"*" (Exodus 31:13). The purpose of the Sabbath was to remember God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:15); the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember Christ's deliverance of us from sin. This explains why the Sabbath is unique to the Old Testament, since it is not a New Testament command (cf. Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16-17) and why the Lord's Supper is only given for the church.

While the New Covenant was made "*with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*" (Jeremiah 31:31), it is rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, where God promised Abraham that "*in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*" The Messiah of Israel, bringing the forgiveness of sins as the Savior of the world. Peter made this point in Acts 3:25-26, "*It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.*" Therefore, the blessings of the New Covenant have been extended to all people, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The promise of the kingdom (26:29)

Jesus spoke specifically of His death in the coming hours when He said, "*I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*" This will be the last time Jesus would drink until He returns with the kingdom of God. He had spoken to them often about this coming kingdom, as recently as the previous chapter, and He assured them again of the kingdom that God will establish.

Therefore, the Lord's Supper is not only a remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death for the sin of man, it is also a reminder that He will return again with the promised kingdom. This was part of what Paul taught to the Corinthians, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The Lord's Supper, as a sign of the New Covenant, will continue in the church age until the Lord returns. When He returns with the kingdom of God, "*The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain*" (Isaiah 25:6), when we will "*recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 8:11).

Conclusion

Jesus' inauguration of the Lord's Supper occurs at the pivotal moment in history. It concludes the last Passover of God's work through the Jewish people as they will reject their Messiah, the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). The Passover remembered the deliverance of Israel from bondage to the Egyptians, and Jesus used this to launch a remembrance of a far greater deliverance, our spiritual deliverance from bondage to sin.

Furthermore, the Exodus was more than delivering the Israelites from bondage, it also anticipated their arrival in the land that God had promised to them. They were delivered from bondage into blessing. In the same way as the Passover celebrated this work of God in Israel, so now the Lord's Supper celebrates the work of God in the believer. We have been delivered from bondage to sin into the blessing of the kingdom of God through the New Covenant.

It is important to celebrate both what we have been delivered from and what we have been delivered to. We are blessed by Jesus' sacrificial death by crucifixion for the penalty of our sin and we are blessed by what the forgiveness of sin brings, namely access to God's holy presence and inclusion in His kingdom. Being justified, declared righteous, through the redemption of Christ, delivers us from eternal destruction into the joy of the eternal kingdom. *"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"* (Matthew 25:46).