

With Eyes Open to Our Common Savior: How the Lord's Supper Makes Visible God's New Covenant People

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So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.
— Genesis 31:53–54 —

In the Old Testament covenants were often begun or accompanied by a covenant meal. In Genesis 31 Jacob and Laban made a covenant to not do harm to one another. And importantly, this covenant was concluded with a meal. While these neighbors entered the covenant with animosity between them, they ended the meal reconciled with one another.

Again, when Israel made a covenant with God at Sinai, Moses, Aaron and his sons, as well as the elders of Israel, ate in the presence of God (Exodus 24:9–11). In this covenant-making chapter, this meal highlights the fellowship that God intended to have with his holy people. Accordingly, the people of Israel, throughout their history, were called to attend yearly festivals that included sacrifices for sin and meals to celebrate the renewal of the covenant (see Lev 23).

Even in Jesus' day, the nation of Israel gathered to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Early in his life, Jesus's whole family attended the Passover (Luke 2). And later, John recorded the events of Jesus's ministry by reference to the various festivals Jesus celebrated (2:23; 4:45; 5:1; 6:4; etc.)

Such meals were more than yearly celebrations, however. They also identified *who* the Israelites were. They were the ones who God saved from Egypt by means of a Passover lamb and a meal of unleavened bread. In addition, the Law of Moses given at Sinai included detailed lists of food laws (Leviticus 11; cf. Deuteronomy 14:1–21). From these instructions about food, it is not surprising how Israel's meals identified God's people with their Redeemer and with one another.

Therefore, when Jesus came to celebrate the Passover on the night before his crucifixion, it is little wonder the magnitude of his words. Matthew records them like this:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (26:26–29)

Taking the Passover meal, Jesus turned it towards himself. No longer would his disciples merely celebrate the shadow of the Passover, looking back to Egypt. Now, they would see the substance of the Passover, as they ate the bread and drank the cup. Jesus's death and resurrection fulfilled the Passover, created a new covenant, and invited participation from a "holy nation" of disciples comprised of all nations.

In Christ, therefore, we see the One whom all the festivals, sacrifices, and meals pointed. In fact, he is more than the host of the meal. He is the meal. His body and blood were broken and bloodied, in order for us to have a place at his covenant meal.

To be clear, we do not believe the elements of bread and wine transfigure into flesh and blood. But they do remind us of what Jesus did. And with an understanding of the place of meals in our covenant relationship with God, we discover the privilege of sitting to table with Christ and our brothers and sisters in Christ. More than just showing up as individuals who eat the same food at the same time, the Lord's Supper is a community-creating and covenant-keeping meal.

Truly, the Scriptures give us a vision for understanding the Lord's Supper that is vastly different than our Western, individualistic, consumeristic meal-making. While today, individuals sit down next to one another at *Chick-Fil-A* or *Chipotle*, their common meal does not create a covenant. But in the church, the Lord's Supper turns strangers into friends and more than that, it turns enemies into family. This is what all the covenant meals did in the Old Testament, and now the same thing happens when we first take the Lord's Supper. Moreover, every time we take the Lord's Supper with the people of God, we are reminded of Christ and the people with whom we are redeemed.

This Sunday, therefore, when we take the Lord's Supper, let us not just close our eyes and only think of God and me. Let us look around and marvel at how God has created a people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By water baptism, God has publicly identified those people to the world. And now together when we take the Lord's Supper, we are reminding each other of our common Savior and our covenantal communion that will outlast this world and stand for eternity!

May God be pleased to strengthen our hearts with bread and wine this Sunday. And may the communion table strengthen our fellowship with one another—a fellowship that is found in Christ and the Spirit he has given to us. Until he comes, let us eat the bread, drink the cup, remember the cross, and to do all these things in communion with the church.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds