

February 23, 2020

“The Lord’s Supper - Our Great Assurance”
Matthew 26:17-30

FCF: Uncertain of where we stand

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has given us the Lord’s Supper.
(magnet) And that is a source of great assurance.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

A headline from last week (**READ quote**): *Twitter users scold woman who posed on 2,800-foot mountain's edge: 'No picture is worth falling'*. It all started with a 15-second video of a woman on Pedra da Gavea in Brazil inching down a near vertical slope, smiling and then throwing her arms up in the air. A stunning view but with uncertain footing. If any at all.

Uncertain footing - not knowing where we stand - is never good. Not on mountains or in our relationships. And not just our relationships with one another but especially our relationship with God. Can we know where we stand there? Has He given us a way to know for sure?

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 26:17-30**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Our lives are full of symbols. Street signs mark our location. Handshakes mark a sealing of a deal. Signatures mark the truthfulness of a statement. Wedding rings mark a pledge of our faithfulness. Still, it’s possible to misunderstand a symbol. Not all rings are wedding bands. Not all hand gestures are friendly. And some can mean different things in different cultures.

Jesus has given the Lord’s Supper. It’s something of a symbol and can be misunderstood as well. So the context in which it was given is vital. This was Holy Week. On Sunday, Jesus entered the city as its king. On Monday, He cleansed the temple. On Tuesday, he delivered the Olivet Discourse, speaking to what was to come on both the near and far horizon. In the midst of all this, as we saw last week, even as Jesus was anointed by a woman who grasped who He is and why He had come, a plot was formed to get rid of Him. Momentum was building. All of this was coming to a head. But before the crescendo arrived, Jesus paused. He slowed down the train. Why? So as to give His followers a sign, a symbol and pledge. The Lord’s Supper.

Jesus has given us the Lord’s Supper. And it is a source of great assurance. He has given us the Lord’s Supper. And it is a source of great assurance. “How so?” In the things it makes clear. First, His sovereign power. Second, His gracious love. And third, His costly faithfulness.

I. HIS SOVEREIGN POWER

First, the way the Lord’s Supper shows His sovereign power (**READ Matthew 26:17-19**).

A) Ancient Customs

1. Limits to what we can know

Thinking about the ancient customs surrounding the Passover, we need to know there are limits to what we can know. What little we have about the particulars come from 3rd century writings.

2. Likely elements to the meal

That said, a few things are clear. Family representatives prepared the Passover - meaning they would have priests slaughter a lamb and it was then brought home. Other dishes were readied. The question would be asked, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" and the story of the exodus was told. Four cups of wine were taken at specified times. Hymns were sung. All of these things were likely present during Jesus' last supper and can be inferred from the Gospels.

B) Jesus' Purposes

Those were the ancient customs. Now note Jesus' purposes demonstrated throughout.

1. For that night

Starting with just that night. He wanted an uninterrupted evening to give His disciples their final instructions. Given His celebrity status and the scheming of the religious officials, it had to be safe and secret. So a pre-arranged signal was given to the disciples. Note the intentionality here.

2. With His mission

But it goes beyond this. He said, "My time is at hand." Until this point, it had not been. Now it was. The key moment in the eternal unchangeable plan of God had come. To Jesus' disciples, things seemed chaotic. To His enemies, it seemed they were calling the shots. Both were wrong. He was in charge at every step along the way - not only what was to happen, but when and how.

The very context of the Lord's Supper was a demonstration of Jesus' sovereign power.

Application:

Jesus was in control of all the events of that week. And He is in control of every week there has ever been. Including now. He is Lord over history - globally and individually. Ours.

Think of that and bring that over to the whole of whatever is going on in your life right now. There is great comfort, encouragement, and confidence to be found there. He is Lord. We can truly leave all things, all results, to Him. That means we can pray, plan, work, and then rest.

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II. HIS GRACIOUS LOVE

The second thing we see in all this is Jesus' gracious love (**READ Matthew 26:20-25**).

A) A Sobering Statement

1. A betrayal

What a sobering statement. Four times, less we miss it, "betrayal" is mentioned. There was a traitor in their midst. "One of you - one who has shared table fellowship with me this night." A betrayal is one of the ugliest, most painful things imaginable. We hate to even think about it.

2. Prophecy fulfilled

And it was all according to prophecy. Traitors plan. But there was another plan that came far before this one. Not that this let anyone off the hook. The Bible makes clear two things - God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Which means that this traitor would bear this for eternity.

B) The Mixed Responses

1. The other eleven

Jesus' words led to a mixed response. The other eleven were sorrowful, distressed and grieved. You hear it in their questions. They knew something of their hearts and feared it might be them.

2. Judas himself

Then there is Judas. It's worth visualizing the seating arrangement. Pulling together the customs and the accounts, this was a gathering around a U-shaped table. Each man was lying on their left side with their feet stretched out away from the table. Jesus would have been at the center, with two honored places beside Him - John on one side and Judas on the other. Judas asks a question - not "Lord" but "Rabbi." It's possible that he was awed by the curse Jesus had pronounced. Or he was just trying to cover himself, feigning the fear the others were feeling. It's quite sobering.

Here's the thing. It is the brokenness, weakness, and sinfulness of these men at this meal that makes this meal - and all it represents - necessary. It is what we see transpiring at this meal that makes all that this meal is about absolutely vital. The establishment of the Lord's Supper, what we see in these moments, is a powerful demonstration of Jesus' gracious love for us.

Application:

And nothing has changed. We have the same need. We have committed cosmic treason against God. We suffer from a spiritual cancer. We face eternal death. We have the same need.

And the same solution. We need another to die in our place. We cannot save ourselves. We need a substitute, someone from among us who is without stain to take the stain away.

That is exactly what and who we have in Jesus. His is a gracious love. It is a love not just to the undeserving. This is a love to the ill-deserving. That is so humbling. And so good.

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III. HIS COSTLY FAITHFULNESS

So we see His power, His love, and His costly faithfulness (**READ Matthew 26:26-30**).

A) A New Covenant

1. The new words

The covenant Jesus speaks of here is the new covenant. It is alluded to with the new words He mixes into the Passover. He says something very new in the context of something very old.

2. A new day

A new day has come (**READ Jeremiah 31:31-34**). This covenant between God and His people would have as its central focus the forgiveness of our sin and a right relationship with God.

B) Only through Sacrifice

That long awaited day has come. But only through sacrifice. Only through His sacrifice.

1. The great question answered

Which is the answer to the greatest questions we could ever ask. "How can we be forgiven?" Surely it cannot be through the deaths - no matter how many - of these lambs. Surely that could

only point to the death of another. “How can we be forgiven? How can God be both merciful and just?” Through Jesus’ body broken and His blood shed. Clearly speaking of a violent death.

2. Other questions raised

The greatest questions are answered here. Of course, other questions are raised. What does He mean when He says, “This is my body”? The Roman Catholic belief is that an invisible change takes place where the bread becomes Jesus’ body and the wine becomes His blood. But Jesus is clearly speaking metaphorically. Even as He says those words, He is there holding that bread.

Others have swung to the other extreme and said this is nothing more than a memorial. It is all purely figurative. But that would mean that we are just simply carrying out a mental exercise.

More likely, Jesus is saying He is really present when we gather at the table - not physically but spiritually. He is present and working in those who come in faith to remind and reassure us.

Back to the main thing. The Lord’s Supper is an expression of His costly faithfulness.

Application:

We live in this new covenant that has come through Jesus’ sacrifice. Which means we are truly free. More than freedom from Egyptian bonds and chains, we are free from sin’s power and penalty. Think of what we have. And who. If God is for us, who or what can be against us?

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CONCLUSION:

Remember “show-and-tell”? It’s a rite of passage for school kids. You bring an item from home and explain why you chose it, where it came from, etc. I recall what it was like for me. My kindergarten teacher had a calendar marking our turns. As we got closer, my zeal would shift to nerves. Was my item good? Would I fumble my words? Such pressure. But show-and-tell is good for the child. And the class. After all, something is shown that holds your attention.

The Lord’s Supper is a show-and-tell. You say, “But we’re adults.” Not really. We are children. And we need both to hear and to see. Now the worship service is full of gospel telling.

- “We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.”
- “Your sin is worse than you dared to fear. But God’s love is better than you dared to hope.”
- “Because of Jesus’s finished work, there’s nothing you can do to make God love you any more than He already does. Or any less.”

It is the good news of the King and the coming of His kingdom. All of that is gospel telling.

But with the Supper there is gospel showing. There are things for all the senses. We touch, smell, and taste the gospel. But this is more than just hitting other learning styles. Jesus says that, for those who come to the table in faith, He promises His presence. By the working of His Spirit, there are both signs for the mind and seals for the heart of who and whose we are.

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