

The Lord's Supper: The Feast of the Eschatological Kingdom

Luke 22

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

Today is an important day for Westminster church. As you know, we have decided, after long deliberation, debate, study and prayer, to move to weekly communion. There are a lot of reasons for doing this – and there are, among some, concerns about it. So this morning we are beginning a new series on the Lord's Supper. And as we do, let me just state explicitly the assumption which underlies this series. It is this: That, if one sees the richness of the sacrament, if one sees the depth and beauty of that feast, and the benefits of Christ conveyed to us there. In short, if one grasps the logic, the theo-logic, of the Supper, then one will, almost inevitably, desire it with greater frequency. It is after all a means of grace, and we desperately need grace.

We want to begin to today with the text from Luke's gospel. In Matthew, Mark and Luke there are narratives recorded, on the night that Jesus was betrayed and arrested, in which he institutes, he solemnly leaves us, the holy Supper. Of these institution narratives, the one in Luke's gospel is remarkable. It is the longest and richest account, and thus the most instructive for us about the nature of the table. We will look at it, Lord willing, over the next couple of weeks. Today we will look at vv. 14-18 and vv.28-30. We will make two points: The Supper and The Significance.

I. The Supper

First, then, the Supper. At the outset we see that the climactic importance of this meal for Jesus' life and ministry cannot be overstated. Luke indicates this by saying in v.1 of chapter 22 that the feast drew near. In v.7 he says the day for the feast came. And at the opening of our text he says: "when the hour came." And "the hour" is associated with the hour of Jesus' passion.

So, Jesus reclines at table with the apostles. And he says: I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. Jesus is intensely focused on what transpires here. He literally says, "with desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you." He is impassioned about what he is about to do. It is a momentous meal.

Think about how much freight this meal carries. THIS is how he summarizes and condenses his entire life, his obedience, his teaching and miracles, his upcoming passion and resurrection triumph. THIS is the distillation of his life and mission. THIS is what he institutes for the church---in his last hours with the apostles --- THIS he leaves as the means to remember and commune with him, until the end of the age. No other ritual, no other explicit instruction on what to do as we gather --- this. This the church had, even before she had the NT. This is the Passover, which he will transform into the remembrance of his own suffering.

In v.16 he says: For I tell you, I will not eat it, until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. So immediately--- get this: the meal is associated with the kingdom of God. Now, Jesus did eat with his disciples after the resurrection, but those were not Passover meals, and that is not what is in view here when he speaks of a future eating. All things are not yet fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is speaking, then, Calvin says, not of post-resurrection meals, but of gathering his disciples into blessed and immortal life.

So the kingdom of God here – in this text -- is future. It is the kingdom in its coming eschatological fulness and glory. It is THEN, that ALL the Passover/Supper points to will be fulfilled. In Israel the pattern, the order, went as follows (RH theology): Passover, then Exodus, then Wilderness, then Canaan. In New Covenant, Jesus is the final Passover Lamb, and in this very gospel, in Luke 9, his death is called his Exodus. And his death, the new Exodus, leads the church out of bondage to sin and death. And out into its wilderness pilgrimage in this world, as it journeys to what Canaan points to, namely, the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth.

So the pattern is broadly the same: Passover, Exodus, Wilderness, New Creation. The point is this – it is this whole process which fulfills the Passover, fills it up with its full meaning. And the end is complete deliverance from all enemies, holy communion with God in a holy realm, and with all the saints, past and present, in immortal glory. Listen to how Luke puts this in chapter 13 of his gospel: In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. Notice: weeping and gnashing of teeth, that is, the final judgment, and eating, reclining at table with the resurrected saints, are parallel – they both refer to the eschaton.

So, here's the point. When Jesus speaks of reclining at table in the kingdom of God he is clearly speaking of the consummation. If you look at v.18, after Jesus distributes a cup (aside: probably the first or second cup of the Jewish Passover meal, not the cup which he will consecrate a little later in the meal in v.20). He takes that cup, gives thanks, asks them to divide it among themselves, and says: from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the Kingdom of God comes.

This is, remarkably, the second reference to the kingdom, and Jesus has not even gotten to the words of institution yet. The Kingdom, which has already come in Jesus, is spoken of here as coming in the future. I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God, which has come, comes again in fulness. Then, Jesus will partake in the feast, with us, and with ALL the saints, for then the union of Christ and his bride is consummated.

Further confirmation of this future kingdom theme is seen down in verses 28 through 30. There Jesus says this, and he's speaking uniquely to the apostles here: I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom. He assigns to the apostles a kingdom. What does this kingdom entail? The very next words are: "that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

We've already seen that reclining at table for Jesus is an eschatological image. Here he adds that the twelve will sit on thrones, judging the renewed Israel of God. Whatever this might entail, one thing is certain: *It refers to the age to come. Jesus says something virtually identical in Matthew 19:* "Truly, I say to you, in the new world (literally: in the regeneration), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

This language of the Son of Man *sitting* on his glorious throne, is also language of the end. Yes, the Son of Man is enthroned as King now, but he *SITS* on his throne, he assumes the role of judge in the cosmic courtroom-- at the end. Here's Matthew 25 on the final judgment of the sheep and the goats: When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, *then* he will sit on his glorious throne. (Sitting is eschatological language)

So when the Son of Man judges the world, the apostles will judge the Israel of God. So, again, I belabor this, so you can see the future orientation both at the beginning, and at the end of our text. Five times here, in instituting the Supper, Jesus refers to the consummation. In short, in referring to the Kingdom of God here, he is speaking of what the Book of Revelation calls -- the Marriage Supper of the Lamb which commences with his return. The supper is the feast of the kingdom. More precisely, we've seen, it's the feast of the coming eschatological kingdom.

II. The Significance

Which brings us to our second point. The significance of all this. First, the Supper is a sacrament. The sacrament is a blessed gift, and grace is really communicated to us there, we partake of the kingdom there, because we partake of the king. But it is the nature of sacraments to signify and point beyond

themselves. A sacrament is not the thing itself, but a foretaste of the thing, an appetizer, a pointer, a signpost directing us to the thing. And thing, the reality, as we have just seen, is the eschaton, the future consummation, the kingdom of God come in fulness, where all the saints... resurrected, fellowship in unity and peace, in shalom, with Jesus hosting the meal, not through his ministers, but in his embodied glory.

In light of what it is, its essence, the Supper in the history of the church, has been something of a tragedy. The meal Jesus gave us to anticipate the coming wedding feast, to bind us into one, to seal and even to create unity, has been the source of ugly, long-standing division in the church. Even anger and hostility. And the irony of this seems to be lost on us. Here – of all places-- here -- we fight over what the elements are, and what they become, and how exactly is Christ present, if at all, how the Supper should be celebrated... who should come to the Supper, what age should they come at, how often should we have it. What kind of bread, what type of wine, how should it be distributed, how should we conduct ourselves.

Differences over the Supper scar the face of Christendom. But in the midst of all this, I will tell you what an even greater tragedy is. What is an even more monstrous source of disorder, and a sign of an immense lack of proportion. People have all these opinions, sometimes fierce opinions, about the Supper --- all the stuff I mentioned and more. There is great passion involved.

The sacrament this, and the sacrament that. But do you know what there is virtually zero passion about? What the sacrament points to. Which is not merely some tepid, tame thing called communion with Jesus. It is eschatological communion with Jesus – AND all the saints, and the patriarchs and the prophets – in glory, in the kingdom of God. Not one person has ever said to me: We need the sacrament because we must kindle a ferocious heavenly mindedness, a yearning for the coming kingdom of God and the wedding feast of the Lamb – and yet THAT is precisely what the Supper is designed to do. And if we've been taking it for years – and do not find ourselves groaning for the end, the coming of the kingdom (Face of our Beloved) – then we should examine just what we have been doing.

To treat the Supper as an end in itself is a form of idolatry. We are not to be obsessed with the sacrament --- we are to be obsessed with what the sacrament points to – what the sacrament is a sacrament of. Otherwise we are like people clinging to, fighting over, arguing about, a sign that says: "Pittsburgh 10 Miles." While Pittsburgh itself stirs very little passion. All the passion we generate is about the sacrament, and NOT about the eschatological kingdom, of which it is the feast. And that is a grotesque disorder. After all, think about this for a second. We have a piece of bread, a drink of wine, consecrated by our Lord's word to be sure, and we commune with Jesus, who, while present by the Spirit to our faith – in his ascended body, remains unseen, remains in heaven.

It's pretty clear that this is not our destination – its pretty paltry as far as feasting goes. We do grasp the reality here, but we grasp it by faith, through a glass darkly, and the very nature of the table is to stimulate in us, a yearning for faith to give way to sight. None of this is to say the Supper isn't rich and deep and delightful. It is. But is not those things in and of itself. All of its glory is borrowed glory, if you will, borrowed from the future, from the kingdom to come, from the marriage Supper of the Lamb. From the ascended and coming Christ.

It is that reality, of face to face communion with Jesus, in the kingdom of God, which confers the splendor on this apparently meager table. The Supper is grand because it signifies, seals, and is a foretaste, the antechamber, the appetizer, of the coming kingdom feast. The Supper, then, is the feast of the kingdom of God. It must make heavenly, eschatological people of us – else we are profaning it.

When we come to the table then, we are remembering what Jesus did for us. But this looking back in the Supper, has been rightly called the memory of the future. For in the very act of remembering we are lifted up into heaven, into communion with the ascended and glorified Lord and Host of the meal. And in being lifted up, we are lifted out into the future, into the coming kingdom of God, into the eschaton, into the coming marriage Supper of the Lamb. Into the day of resurrection and Sabbath rest with Jesus and all the saints. It is this which makes the Supper a place of nourishment for pilgrims on their wilderness journey. It is this which makes the Supper a place of light and gladness. It is this which, through the Spirit, makes the Supper a flame to kindle the blessed hope of the church, that you might abound in hope, through the proper use of this sacrament, the feast of the eschatological kingdom of God. Amen.

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