



Breaking Bread 1: The Last Supper

Background

It is probably fair to say that I am passionate about Communion. It is so rich in significance, yet we often only ever skim the surface without tapping into this richness when we participate. Sometimes we get so caught up in the wrapping or all the baubles, we forget about the incredible gift inside. I think that receiving communion should be a central part of our lives as Christians. In this our first study on Breaking Bread, we shall begin to explore something of what it means to Break Bread and ask ourselves why is it so significant?

‘The Lord’s Supper’ has been a central part of the Christian community from the very beginning (Acts 2: 42). In the early church, it typically included a feast or a fellowship meal followed by the celebration of Communion. It has developed various forms, has been understood in various ways, and has been called by various names. It is worthwhile to spend a few moments then taking a look at the different names by which the Lord’s Supper may be referred to:

- ! **‘Communion’, or ‘Holy Communion’**: emphasising fellowship and relationship with God and with others (1 Corinthians 10:16).
- ! **‘Breaking Bread’**: stressing the context of a meal (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 24:30; Luke 22:19).
- ! **‘Eucharist’**: stressing *‘thanksgiving’* from the Greek *‘to give thanks’* (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).
- ! **‘The Lord’s Supper’ or ‘The Lord’s Table’**: remembering its origin in the events of the last supper, sometimes called the ‘Lord’s table’ (1 Corinthians 10: 21) (1 Corinthians 11: 20).
- ! **‘Agape’**: from the Greek word for *‘love’*, translated *‘love feast’* (Jude 12; Acts 2:42, 46; 1 Corinthians 11:20 - 22, 33 - 34).
- ! **‘The Mass’**: in the Roman Catholic tradition, from the Latin *‘missio’*, *‘to dismiss’*, referring to the dismissal of the catechumen before the eucharist was celebrated; some suggest *‘missa est’* became synonymous with *‘blessing’* and thus linked with the consecration of the elements.

The Message

There is much debate within the wider church about how Jesus is present in and through Communion. I do not propose to cover this debate in this study; I also recognise that there is a diversity of practice. Again, I will lay these differences to one side; more rather I want to focus on the central truths that are broadly accepted and foundational to our belief.

Communion, along with baptism is usually referred to as a sacrament. They are two services which were instituted by Jesus himself and which specifically proclaim the gospel. There are three



aspects which we shall focus on. Communion is a means of:

- Remembering our sin and the incredible price that Jesus paid for us on the cross. A real experience of God's grace and our gratitude for our salvation;
- Being in communion with Christ AND with each other, reminding ourselves perhaps that as the church we are the bride of Christ and body of Christ;
- Looking forward with eager anticipation and excitement to the wedding feast that we shall enjoy one day in heaven, the wedding feast of the lamb as we symbolically celebrate the feast on earth until He comes.

According to the gospels, the last supper was the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples before His death. We also know that the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal (which we shall look at in more detail in our second study in this series).

There are four main scripture readings to consider:

- Matthew 26: 26 - 30
- Mark 14: 22 - 26
- Luke 22: 15 - 20
- 1 Corinthians 11: 23 - 29

These are presented below:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and giving thanks, He broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, that I will by no means 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.” And having sung hymns, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”
(Matthew 26: 26 - 30)

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And taking the cup and giving thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” And having sung hymns, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”
(Mark 14: 22 - 26)

“Then He said to them, “I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, that no longer will I eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, “Take



this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, that I will by no means drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”” (Luke 22: 15 - 20)

“The Lord Jesus, during the night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and having given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which has been broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of the body of the Lord and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and in this way let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup. For he that eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not judging correctly the body of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 11: 23 - 29)

These verses reveal some key points that we need to consider:

- In the church in Corinth, the fellowship meal became a time when people forgot what lies at the heart of Communion. Some ate and drank to excess, whilst others went hungry. Aspects that are central to Communion include:
 - ▶ **Unity.** We are instructed in the verses in 1 Corinthians to ‘*examine*’ ourselves. We need to make sure we are right with God and right with each other. If not, we need to make our peace with God and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - ▶ **Hope and remembrance.** We are told instructed to take Communion ‘*in remembrance*’ of Jesus. In taking Communion, we are poignantly reminded of the great price that Jesus paid for each and everyone of us, once for all. We are ‘*proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes*’. It speaks of the heart of and truth of the Kingdom of God. We are reminded of Jesus saying on the cross ‘*It is finished*’. We are filled with hope, as we remember Christ saying that one day He will ‘*drink it new*’ with us in His Father’s Kingdom. No matter how weary, broken and lost we might feel, we are reminded of eternity.
 - ▶ **Love.** We are told of Christ’s body being broken for us, and Christ’s blood being shed or poured out for us. There can be no greater price (see John 3:16, John 15:13). We are reminded too of the first two commandments:



“Then Jesus said to him, “You will love the LORD your God with your whole heart [fig., your entire inner self] and with your whole soul and with your whole understanding¹.” “This is [the] first and great commandment.” “But a second [one is] similar to it, “You will love your neighbour as yourself².”” “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”” (Matthew 22: 37-40)

- ▶ **Grace.** A new covenant. Jesus’ blood was “*shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins*”. Some communion services include in the liturgy the words “*We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table*”. This reminds us how there is nothing in us that makes us worthy of participating in communion and that the fact that through Jesus we can is a testament to God’s incredible grace. Hand-in-hand with grace goes forgiveness and justification. We are forgiven by Christ and justified through His sacrifice.
- ▶ **Faith.** We cover faith in a separate Bible study, but suffice to say that participating in communion is an act of faith and a declaration of faith. We are “*proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes.*”
- ▶ **Blessing.** I believe that when the Body of Christ shares in Communion together it is a place or moment of blessing. God yearns to bless His people. In sharing Communion we are echoing a truth that has been declared for centuries. We are effectively saying to Christ I believe in the price that You paid for me, I believe in the Kingdom, and I believe that I will one day drink it new with You in Your Father’s Kingdom.

Questions

1. Think about the things that you find hardest to forgive. Write them down on a piece of paper. If you are working through this study alone, spend some time bringing each one before God in prayer, asking Him to help you to forgive and not harbour bitterness in your hearts. If you working through this study in a group, you may wish to do something similar, but spend some time sharing with each other the biggest or hardest things you each find to forgive and why. End by praying that God would enable you and remind you of His forgiveness when you share in Communion. When you get an opportunity, make peace with one another. Humble yourself and try to speak the truth in love, which is not reacting to a hurt in haste, but prayerfully sharing a concern with a brother or sister in Christ.

¹Deuteronomy 6: 4-5

²Leviticus 19: 18



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2. Has Communion become something that is routine, where you feel like you are going through the motions? What are your hopes? What are you expectant of? What things would you like to lay at the foot of the cross? Think about these things, and share them with God before you share in Communion. Ask Him to be Lord of every aspect of your life and bless You with Faith.
 3. How do we know as a Body of Christ that we love each other?
 4. How does the world know that we are disciples of Christ?
 5. How can we effectively share the love that we have for each other with the world?
 6. In what ways do you think Communion might be a different experience for you from now on?