

BREAKING OF BREAD

A SUNDAY FAMILY DEVOTION (7 JUNE 2020)

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Call your family together for a Family Devotion. (The time you would have gone to church) Set 60-90 minutes aside for Praise and Worship, Word Reading and Study, Prayer and Breaking of Bread. Encourage the involvement of every family member. The outline below will assist you.

Please take note! Next Sunday we will have a Video Message again.

Acts 2:42 ESV *and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

Acts 2:46 ESV *and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,*

The Breaking of Bread refers to the fact that the early church was a communal church, they gathered often, even daily. We are told they ate their bread with generosity and simplicity, they shared in meals together, they were a family. This family centred around the person of Jesus Christ - it was a Gospel family, a Gospel community.

Luke records it in his Gospel account.

Luke 22:14-20 ESV *and when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. (15) And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. (16) For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (17) And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. (18) For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." (19) And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (20) And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

In the Gospel of John, we have the clearest explanation of what the Communion meal signifies.

John 6:51-56 ESV *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (52) The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (53) So, Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (54) Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (55) For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. (56) Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*

When the early church got together the centre of their attention was always the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for their sakes. It was a true meal, in a home, and in that meal the bread and the wine would be present and at some point and time, attention would be drawn to the fact that Jesus body was broken and his blood was shed for the forgiveness of sin, his perfect life for their imperfect lives. The bread would be passed and eaten, then the cup of wine would be passed, and it would be drunk. The act of taking and eating the broken bread and drinking the cup of wine/ grape juice is an act of trust in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus for our sin on the cross. We are saying You died so we can live, and only because You died can we now live.

The Lord's Supper points backwards, inward, forward, and outward.

1. It Points Backwards.

Jesus said:

"Do this is remembrance of me."

It is obvious that the Lord's Supper points backwards not simply to the Last Supper but to what that supper pointed to; that Jesus Christ, the son of God, in the flesh, would suffer the death of the cross. That he would experience the everlasting burnings of the wrath of God, to call on God and not have him answer, that he would be plunged into God forsakenness, twisted, tortured, moving painfully in his own blood, in order that we would be spared the wrath of God and experience instead God's forgiveness, imputed righteousness, and gracious acceptance as his beloved children. We look back in the act of the Lord's Supper to remember God's most powerful display of salvation and love, where he gave himself for our sins.

"It is finished"

These were the words that Jesus spoke before he died on the cross. Jesus suffered for us (he says that in the Luke passage - "For you"), it is finished. He bore all our sin on the cross, there is nothing you or I can do to add to it. In fact, to add to it would only be to take away from it. It is finished. These are words we need to hear again and again. It is finished, our redemption is accomplished.

The Lord's supper in some traditions is called the Eucharist - meaning thanksgiving! The act of the Lord's Supper should produce in us thankful worship to God - we live because he died!

2. It Points Inward

The act of the Lord's Supper points inward to our hearts, centring our lives around the person of Jesus Christ, and finding our sole identity in what he has done for us.

Fredrick Bruner in his commentary on the Gospel of John asks the question, *"What is the Lord's supper?"* This is his answer - *"it is the word becoming flesh again and again. It is the most earthy way that the heavenly Lord wants to be with us. The sacraments are not a second way of salvation; they are simply Jesus' one way of salvation scaled down, physicalised, individualised, simplified, and concretised, from hearts to hands, from soul to body, from group to individual. He knew that we need not only spiritual things but also physical things in order to grasp him more easily, to "come" to him more specifically. He is giving himself to us in this fresh new way in order to humanise and personalise his coming to us and to particularise our coming to him....The Lord's Supper is a repeated Altar Call to ongoing conversion, to fresh recommitments and entrustments of oneself to the Lord Jesus Christ, The Bread of Life"*

The Lord's Supper helps the Church remain Christ-centred...every time we break bread we are reminded, "This is my body, given for you; take, eat, and be grateful! This is my blood, shed for you and for all human beings for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me, etc."

But what does it mean to remember? Does it simply mean we should not let thoughts slip out of our minds? Does it mean we reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus, so we feel really thankful or really awful? For many Christians, to remember is an ambiguous mental activity. But in the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where we recalibrate our lives according to what is being remembered.

Jesus says, -*"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."* -He is offering us permanence, permanent ongoing association, and identity with him - making our home with him and he with us.

Just as Paul says, *"he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."* (with your identity in the immutable, you will never be greatly shaken)

The Lord's Supper is the opportunity or invitation to trust/ believe (in a physical way) by re-orienting our lives around him, making him the centre of our universe, making him our home, making him our sole identity.

3. It Points Forward

The Lord's Supper points forward to the Kingdom of God. Jesus said he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drank it anew in the kingdom, and Paul follows this and says in 1 Corinthians 11, *"for as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.."*

We see from these two passages that the Lord's Supper is to be a picture or foretaste of the kingdom. While it recalls and summarises Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, the feast also looks ahead to the feast in the Kingdom.

Peter Leithart says, *"The Eucharist (Lord's Supper) should be understood as a sign of the renewed creation. The Eucharist is our model of the eschatological order, a microcosm of the way things ought to be."*

What does he mean? For instance, the bread and wine are freely distributed to all who are in communion, this itself anticipates the abundance of the kingdom. As the prophet foretold, *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."* - Isaiah 55:1-2.

The Lord's Supper is a picture of the justice that characterises the coming of the kingdom of God, where none will go hungry because of poverty or alienated labour. No one will hoard a surplus, leaving others lacking - as in the communion meal - bread and wine are freely and equally distributed. The Lord's Supper gives practice for such a kingdom economics. When we do it, we enact a foretaste of the way things ought to be, the way things will be.

4. In Points Outward - to be reconciled to one another

This last point follows on all the rest, particularly the way things ought to be: The Lord's supper is a feast of forgiveness and reconciliation, not just of us with God, but for us to one another. It is a table in the presence of enemies, but also a table where God sits with those who were once enemies. The supper is a gracious communion with a forgiving God; but it is also a supper we eat with one another, and that also will require our forgiveness.

Just as Jesus admonished us to be reconciled with our brother before leaving our gift at the altar (Matthew 5:23-24), so too Paul admonishes the Corinthians to examine themselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:27-34). From the earliest practices of the Church, the discipline of reconciliation has been connected to the Lord's Supper. How can we who have been freely forgiven of all sin withhold forgiveness from one another?

As John says, *"We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."* - 1 John 4:19-20 4.

"In a broken world, the church is called to be the first-fruits of a new creation by embodying a reconciled community; that gathers irrespective of preferences, tastes, class, or ethnicity in order to pursue the common good; and the way we begin to learn that is at the communion table. The habit of examination and reconciliation are meant to be like training wheels meant to let us "try out" forgiveness and reconciliation." - James K. A. Smith

We see how this outward approach also anticipates the kingdom of God when God's Shalom, his peace, will cover the earth, where nations will no longer learn war, and they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. The church is to anticipate this peace in our community relations, and the Lord's supper helps us, reminds us, to do that. It reminds us where we are going ultimately.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are lifelong projects... If Christ, whom we want to love supremely, offers his body and blood equally to us, how can we not want to love, forgive and be reconciled to one another.

Conclusion

I pray that we become more and more a church that centres our community around Jesus' sacrificial death for us. That our celebration of the Lord's Supper would be rich and robust, it would be filled with hallelujahs and amens, with repentance and reconciliation, with affirmation and blessing. That we would truly look backward to the finished work of the cross, inward to the centring of our lives around the person of Christ, forward to what the kingdom will be and how it plays out in our own community economics, and outward as we live out forgiveness and reconciliation toward our brothers and sisters. God help us.

Practical Application

Arrange a special evening meal. Encourage all the members of your family to participate. Set and sit at a dinner table if possible. Create a warm and celebratory atmosphere – make use of candles and decorations. Select music to play softly in the background.

Prepare the communion emblems, a loaf of bread and a goblet of grape juice. Break bread together as part of your meal. Read the portions of scripture from Luke and John on page 1 of these notes. Steer the conversation around the table by allowing the members of your family reflect on how the Lord's Supper points backwards, inward, forward, and outward.

I trust that you will experience God's presence in a real and unique way!