

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 22:1-23

The Last Supper is captured by all four gospel writers. It may be worth your time to compare/contrast each writer's account. They can be found in Matthew 26, Mark 14, here in Luke 22, and John 13-17...John giving far more discourse/teaching in his account.

To set the stage, let me offer N.T. Wright's take on the Last Supper:

"When Jesus wanted to give His followers—then and now—a way of understanding what was about to happen to Him, He didn't teach them a theory. Theories about how Jesus' death dealt with our sins have come and gone throughout church history. Many of them are profoundly moving, drawing together deep spiritual insight, remarkable theological understanding, and a commitment to bring God's saving love to the needy world. Many of them have inspired Christian people with a new view of God's grace and mercy. Theories have their proper place. But they weren't the main thing that Jesus gave His followers. He gave them an act to perform. Specifically, He gave them a meal to share. It is a meal that speaks more volumes than any theory."

Ila did a great job in the sermon on Sunday to break down the significance of the Passover meal in the life of the Jewish people...so I'm not going to rehash that here. Instead, since the celebration of the Lord's Supper (or communion, or Eucharist) has been going on for the last two thousand years by nearly all traditions and expressions of the Christian faith, let's focus on how the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper is meant to form us as Jesus followers.

First, it is to remind us that the way of Jesus is the way of the cross, the way of suffering. So to be "Christian", to be "Jesus followers", that needs to be a way of life we accept. The emblems, representing the body of Jesus broken for us, and the blood of Jesus shed for us, is an invitation to take up the cruciform way of life. The cross is not just something Jesus did FOR US, it is also a call/invitation/example to FOLLOW if we wish to see our lives transformed into His image. As the old saying goes, "No cross, no crown."

Second, the whole picture of a meal around a table is meant to shape our FELLOWSHIP. In I Corinthians 11 Paul chides the Corinthians for partaking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. We who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior are now part of His BODY...along with everyone else who has done the same. We are family. The two most prominent metaphors Scripture uses to describe followers of Jesus collectively is BODY and FAMILY. Again, a meal around a table is beautifully and powerfully appropriate. But something that is often very challenging for people in our place and time is to get over our individualism. We are part of something so much bigger. Being part of the Body of Christ, the Family of God, shapes and molds us. And we are made up of all kinds of different people...many (if not most) we would likely not associate with if it weren't for Jesus bringing us together. Jesus wants us to remember Him by accepting and embracing one another in fellowship. Sadly, we see Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians go unheeded most Sundays in most congregations. Think about it. When is the most "personally focused time" in most worship services? Isn't it the communion

time? We have trained worshippers to have an intense personal experience with God through the elements. According to Paul, however, that part of our gatherings should be the most communal time of our gatherings. Jesus didn't die so it could be "me & God" or "you & God", but "we and God". The elements are to remind us of Jesus...who binds us together.

Third, the Lord's Supper ought to remind us of our covenant commitment. Probably the most shocking thing Jesus said during the Last Supper, or at least what would have caused the disciples to respond with, "Wait! What?" was when Jesus mentioned "*This cup is the **new covenant in my blood...***" (22:20, emphasis added). A phrase like that would naturally catch the attention of any Jewish person. Keep in mind, the Jews, as a people group, were the covenant people of God. God's covenant with them is what marked them out from all the other people in the world. There are at least two things that would have run through the disciple's minds when they heard Jesus' words. First, they would have harkened back to Exodus 24, when the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant as we call it today) was inaugurated:

When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the Lord has said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took of the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

*Moses then took of blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "**This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.**" (Exodus 24:3-8, emphasis added).*

So the disciples would have thought of the ratifying of the Covenant with God. Secondly, they would have thought of the words of Jeremiah:

*"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.*

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34, emphasis added.)

It is probably an understatement to say that the disciple's minds would have been spinning. In fact, Jesus' words would be downright blasphemous, if they weren't true. While the disciples might have been getting accustomed to having mind-blowing experiences in their time with Jesus, this might have taken the cake. This was HUGE.

Likewise, as Christians we, too, are marked by a covenant relationship with God. He has made promises, and we have made commitments. The celebrating of the Lord's Supper is meant to remind us of this covenant relationship—the promises, the commitments, and what it took to create it.

The symbols are to remind us of the story, of our place in the story, and most importantly, the Star of the Story, Jesus. As we find and fulfill our place in His story, we are formed into the people He desires us to be.

- Q. What has the Lord's Supper/Communion meant to you over the years? What's your earliest memories of partaking of Communion? What did you understand at the time? How do you think about it now?**
- Q. What are the various ways you have seen the Lord's Supper/Communion celebrated? What has been especially meaningful to you?**
- Q. Presently, when you participate in the Lord's Supper/Communion, where does your mind tend to go?**
- Q. If it were up to you, how would you like to see the celebration of the Lord's Supper/Communion done at Riverside? And why?**
- Q. (Possible Icebreaker) Describe a special meal you remember? What was special about it?**
- Q. (Possible Icebreaker) Describe what were dinners like for you growing up? How is your present practice of dinner similar or different that how you grew up?**
- Q. How has participating in the Lord's Supper/Communion formed you over the years? (Or, if it is a new experience for you, what does it mean to you?)**
- Q. Upon hearing the background of Passover in the sermon, how has it affected how you see/understand the Lord's Supper/Communion?**
- Q. Does partaking of the Lord's Supper/Communion draw you toward embracing the cruciform life? How so? (If not, why not?)**
- Q. When you partake of the Lord's Supper/Communion how mindful are you of your connection with those around you?**
- Q. As a covenant renewing act, what promises of God, and what commitments on your/our part is your mind drawn to during the Lord's Supper/Communion?**