

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] What is the Lord's Supper? This morning, many of us are going to participate in what we call the Lord's Supper, where we will eat the bread and drink the wine. What is all that about?

Some of you may remember that last Sunday morning we anticipated this morning's participation in the Lord's Supper by describing it as a ceremony of covenant renewal. We were looking last Sunday morning at a historic occasion when the people of God renewed the covenant there as it's recorded for us in Joshua chapter 24. And there I mentioned that for us in the New Testament, we also have opportunity to renew our covenant commitment. We have opportunity to do that in many ways, but very particularly as we participate in the Lord's Supper, understanding it as a covenant, or as a ceremony, rather, of covenant renewal. But that statement, that description of the Lord's Supper as a ceremony of covenant renewal is an affirmation to which the same question could be posed. Well, what's that all about? It's good to know where something fits. Imagine a jigsaw, and particularly an individual piece of a jigsaw puzzle. Now, depending on what piece you had holding in your hand, it might be impossible for you to establish what that piece of the jigsaw puzzle was describing. Or in any case, at best, you could have only a rough idea of what that little piece was describing as you look at it in isolation. But it's obvious, I think, that once that piece is placed in the jigsaw, once it forms part of the big picture, then everything becomes clear.

You are able to see clearly the place that that one piece plays in the big picture. And this morning, I want us to discover, at least in some measure, where the Lord's Supper fits in God's big picture, in the big story of which God is both the author and the lead actor. And we are going to do this by locating the Lord's Supper within the big sweep of redemptive history, of God's saving history.

And this will help us. It will help us both understand what the Lord's Supper was when it was first celebrated in that upper room in Jerusalem, of which we have read some 2,000 years ago. But it will also help us to understand what is going on this morning as we gather around God's table here in Bon Accord.

In the account that we've read in Matthew's gospel, Jesus makes explicit reference to two specific days of great significance in God's big story of salvation. One of those days was in the past, and one of those days was in the future. Let's just notice these two days that Jesus very specifically refers to. In verse 18 of Matthew chapter 26, we read, and particularly there in the second half of the verse, that's sufficient for our purposes, I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples.

[3 : 49] Jesus declares this, I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples. And in making that declaration, what Jesus is doing is that He is looking back to one very specific day in the history of redemption, some 1,400 years before the occasion described in Matthew's gospel. Now, we're going to come back and think about that occasion in a moment. But that's one day, one very specific day that Jesus refers to in this account, looking back. But Jesus also refers to a day in the future. We read of that in verse 29. We made reference to it as we spoke to the children. In verse 29 we read, I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day, when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. So, we can notice what is happening as Jesus is about to participate in a meal, in the Last Supper, in the Lord's Supper. He looks back to a meal, to the Passover meal that the Israelites celebrated, but He also looks forward to a meal in His Father's kingdom.

All of these meals, to which He refers, involved eating and drinking, and very particularly the drinking of wine. It's no wonder that His enemies called Him a glutton and a drunk. So, the Lord's Supper stands in a pivotal position at the very heart of the outworking of God's big story of salvation, looking back to the Passover and God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and looking forward to the Lord's return on that day. And this is the territory that we need to cover this morning, from Passover to Parousia, from Passover to the appearing of Jesus, from the Exodus to the second coming. So, it's quite a broad sweep that we are going to try and cover this morning as we would locate the Lord's Supper at that pivotal point within this big story.

Let's explore what we're going to explore, and do so in the form of a journey, a journey on which there will be five stops that we will be going through. If you wish, we could call it a gospel train that we're going to be embarking on, just to make it a little bit more vivid and, I hope, a little bit more exciting. So, get on board the gospel train, and choo-choo, we're on our way.

Five stops that we need to go through this morning. I'll tell you what they are, and then we'll think of them each in turn. First of all, our first stop, indeed our point of departure, will be Passover.

We've already mentioned it, so we'll begin there. We'll begin at the Passover. We will then move on our journey, short journey, to Sinai, and we'll stop there and pause for a moment. We will then resume our journey and head to Babylon, a bit more of a journey, both geographically and in time. We'll head to Babylon, and we'll briefly stop in Babylon, and then we'll move forward to Jerusalem and to the upper room, to the passage that we've already read this morning. But then we'll get back on the train, and we'll make our way to Aberdeen today, here in Bonacord. But the journey doesn't end there, because then we'll get back on the train, and we'll head to heaven, or perhaps more precisely, to the new heavens and the new earth, which is our ultimate destination. So, that's the journey that we're going to cover. We'll find that as we go along that journey, the Lord's Supper stands at a pivotal place within the big picture, and we'll see the connections, or we'll endeavor to see the connections between the Lord's Supper and these various stops that we make along the way, but especially the language that Jesus uses that allows us to make these connections. First of all, then,

[8 : 12] Passover, our first stop or our departure point. We've already noticed that Jesus looks back to this specific day in the history of God's people. Now, the original Passover was the day when the Lord executed judgment on Egypt by the striking down of the firstborn throughout the land, but passed over.

Hence the name, the Israelite homes that had followed His instructions to sacrifice a lamb and put some of the blood on the sides and tops of the door frames of their houses. So, this was an act of judgment that God was executing upon the firstborn, but the Israelites had been told, if you do this, if you sacrifice a lamb, and if you paint your door frame with this blood, then I will pass over you, and you will not suffer as others will. Hence the name, the Passover. The blood of the slain lamb afforded protection to the people, and this act of judgment, which was the final of the famous ten plagues, served to finally crush Pharaoh's opposition. And the Israelites were able to leave Egypt as free men and head for the promised land. Now, with the purpose that the people would never forget God's deliverance from Egypt, God established a new calendar for His people that would begin with their deliverance from Egypt. And once a year, at the beginning of the year, the people in their respective homes would celebrate the Passover, they would remember how God had delivered them from Egypt at the beginning of their new year.

They would make particular remembrance of this great act of divine deliverance. They would remember, they would celebrate how they had been rescued from Egypt. And very particularly, they would remember the manner in which the blood of the Passover lamb had afforded them protection from death.

Now, this is the very ceremony that Jesus announces He is going to celebrate with His disciples, as we've read there in verse 18. Indeed, the ceremony that He does celebrate with His disciples there in the upper room in Jerusalem. He, together with His disciples, participated in this ceremony of thanksgiving and covenant renewal. And it was as part of this Passover meal that Jesus institutes a new ceremony or sacrament for His disciples, what we commonly term the Lord's Supper, what we're going to participate in this morning. Now, why did Jesus do so on this occasion? You know, we could consider the significance of the significance of the Lord's Supper in isolation to this particular occasion and could say a great deal about it that would be true. But why was it significant that Jesus instituted this sacrament on this particular occasion, when Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Passover?

Well, the appropriateness of the occasion is understood when we understand that Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb. On the following day from this celebration with His disciples, Jesus would hand over His life to death in the place of His people, and His shed blood would provide protection from His people, or for His people, from the judgment of God. Now, that conclusion, or that affirmation that we've made, that Jesus is the final and sufficient Passover lamb is a conclusion we can come to on the basis of following the flow of redemptive history. We don't need proof texts that would explicitly declare that to be the case. But as it happens, we do have specific references and texts in the Bible that declare that to be so, that Jesus is our Passover lamb.

[12:36] Perhaps where that is stated most explicitly and unequivocally is by Paul. In the very letter where he writes to the church in Corinth and explains to them the manner in which they are to celebrate the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 5 and verse 7, we read, "For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." So, we can see the very clear connection that there is between the Lord's Supper and the Passover that Jesus Himself highlights in the record that we have. But we've got to move on in our journey. We get onto our train, and we head not a very great distance. We head to Sinai for our second stop. You see, on leaving Egypt, immediately following the Passover, Pharaoh's opposition has been crushed, though we know he then started to think again. But the point is, the people were able to leave Egypt. And what do they do? Well, they head south. And they head south to Mount Sinai. There was, of course, the small matter of crossing the Red Sea en route, but we have to pass by that swiftly.

Now, their journey to Sinai was a journey of about 200 miles. It's difficult to know with accuracy exactly the location that the Bible refers to, but roughly 200 miles, and they covered the ground in about seven weeks. Now, what's the significance of Sinai, the second stop on our journey? Well, it was at Sinai that God formalized His covenant with Israel as a nation, as the people of God. We know that God entered into a covenant with Abraham many years before, but the covenant of God as a covenant with the nation of Israel begins at Sinai. We know about the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. But what we need to understand is that the giving of the commandments is in the context of God formalizing His covenant with His people. The very law given by God is termed as the book of the covenant.

It's the book of the covenant. It is the book that regulates the manner in which God's people are to live in covenant with God. But what has Sinai, in the establishment of God's covenant with Israel, got to do with the Lord's Supper? See, this is our concern, to relate these stops on the journey to the Lord's Supper.

What then has Sinai got to do with the Lord's Supper? Well, what does Jesus say in verse 28 in reference to the wine the disciples are to drink? Notice there in Matthew chapter 26 and in verse 28, what do we read? Jesus is speaking and He says, This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. This is My blood of the covenant. Now, why is this significant? Well, it's significant because the language is taken practically word for word from the language used by God when He establishes His covenant with His people at Sinai. If we turn to Exodus chapter 24, we're going to read a few verses there. And I think just in the reading of the verses, it will become clear the connection that is established and that Jesus very clearly is deliberately establishing in using this language. In Exodus chapter 24 and verses 1 to 8, it's on page 82. We'll read these verses. This is immediately following the giving of the Ten

Commandments, the giving of the law. Then we read, Then He said to Moses, Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy the elders of Israel, you are to worship at a distance.

[16 : 36] But Moses alone is to approach the Lord. The others must not come near, and the people may not come up with Him. 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 had 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 the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, We will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey. And then notice very particularly what is said.

Moses then took the 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.

The making of a covenant involved sacrifice. Indeed, in Hebrew, the word that is translated in English to make a covenant literally is the word to cut. You would cut a covenant. And so, in the very language, in the very vocabulary, there is as a central element this aspect of sacrifice and the shedding of blood. And that is what occurred as the covenant was established between God and the nation of Israel.

Moses takes the shed blood, and he sprinkles the blood on the people in an act that symbolized their cleansing from sin and consecration to their covenant overlord, to God, to the Lord. And as Jesus quotes the words of Moses that would have been familiar to pious Jews, he does so with one significant modification. Moses had said, This is the blood of the covenant. But what does Jesus say? Jesus says, This is my blood of the covenant. So, there is a change, but it's a deliberate change. Moses, of course, has to speak in those terms. It's not his blood. This is the blood of the covenant. But Jesus, as he celebrates the Passover with his disciples, as he institutes the Lord's Supper, what he says is, This is my blood of the covenant. And so, what Jesus is doing, consciously and deliberately, is drawing a connection between Sinai and what is occurring there in the upper room. He is declaring the inauguration of a new covenant that is made, that is cut with his own blood that he will shed on the following day at Calvary.

[19 : 40] But notice one more delicious detail, and I use the adjective delicious deliberately. You see, there in Exodus chapter 24, in the two verses that follow, what do we read? What happened next? After Moses had declared, this is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you. What happens next? Verse 9, Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel.

Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites. They saw God, and they ate and drank.

They saw God, and they ate and drank. The elders of Israel, Moses, and the leaders of the people, in representation of all the people, ate and drank at God's banqueting table at Sinai as the covenant was established. Well, we need to get back on the train, and we need to head now to Babylon. We began at Passover in Egypt, we moved to Sinai, and now we're heading to Babylon, a long way away from Sinai, and indeed hundreds of years later. But Babylon is our third stop on this journey. And as we chug along to Babylon, we should explain a problem that almost immediately, we could say immediately, emerged when the covenant was made at Sinai, as we've read there in Exodus 24. And the problem was a very simple one, but a very fundamental one, and that is that the people did not keep the covenant. We've read there how the people declared to Moses, we will do everything that God says. There doesn't seem to be any doubt in their minds. But what happened in reality, well, what happened in reality is that before Moses has even had the time to come down from the mountain, where he remained for 40 days, before he even has time to come down, the people are busy making a golden camp. And through history, throughout the history of God's people, this problem would repeat itself time and time again.

Now, we have to be very clear, the problem was not with the covenant itself, but with the people's failure to keep the covenant. We might say the people's inability to keep the covenant, without in any way freeing them from their own responsibility to do so. But this was a problem. It was a very real problem, a problem that ultimately led to a crisis of huge proportions, when God acts in frightening judgment, and Jerusalem is destroyed, and the people are sent into Babylonian exile. And that is how we come to Babylon in this story, because it is in Babylon, or in any case in prophetic writings that were intended for the exiles in Babylon, that we for the first time explicitly discover that it is God's intention to enter into a new covenant with His people. And the reference that we have to that is in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. In fact, the only time in the Old Testament when there is this explicit reference with the very language of new covenant used. In Jeremiah chapter 31, verses 31 to 34. We'll read these verses. Jeremiah 31, on page 793. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. Remember that Jeremiah is writing to the exiles in Babylon.

Everything has gone pear-shaped. Everything has gone wrong. Jerusalem has been destroyed. They're miles from home, and they just wonder what the future holds. And Jeremiah writes to them, he says, the time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

[23 : 46] 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, of which we've read in Exodus chapter 24. Why? Because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will 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.

Very well. But what is the connection between this prophecy of Jeremiah and the Lord's Supper? This is what we're trying to do, establish the connections. Well, what is the connection?

We've already indicated that Jesus was inaugurating a new covenant in His own blood. But what of the actual language of a new covenant? Should we not expect to find such language on the lips of Jesus?

Well, the answer, of course, is that we do. We don't find it as the occasion is recorded in Matthew's gospel, but we do find it as the same occasion is recorded for us in Luke's gospel. In Luke chapter 22, and in verse 20, what do we read? In the same way, after the supper, Jesus took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. We're not talking about contradictory versions, but about complementary accounts. And with Luke's account, it is clearly established that the language that Jesus used on this occasion was the very language of a new covenant, the very language of the prophet Jeremiah. And so, Jesus very deliberately not only uses the language of Sinai, the language of Moses, but He then uses the language of the prophet Jeremiah, as He promised this new covenant that God would establish with His people. But of course, the language of new covenant is not the only connection between the Lord's Supper and Jeremiah's prophecy. Of equal significance is the purpose that Jesus indicates will be served by the pouring out of His blood. You see, that we have in Matthew's gospel, and in Luke's gospel for that matter. In Matthew chapter 26, and in verse 28, this is my blood of the covenant. But then what does Jesus go on to say? Which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, which is precisely what we have discovered in Jeremiah, was the jewel and the crown of the crown of the new covenant, that I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more.

And so, Jesus here in the upper room, as He participates with them in the Passover, as He institutes this new ceremony of covenant renewal, He looks back to the prophecy of Jeremiah directed to the exiles in Babylon.

[27 : 00] How is Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled? Or how is the fulfillment, rather, of his prophecy celebrated? Well, it is celebrated in God's people, the disciples invited to eat and drink at God's banqueting table.

We get back on the train, and we head to Jerusalem, to the upper room. It's the fourth stop. We only have one further stop after this. No, we have two further stops after this, but they're brief stops.

The upper room. Now, though this is pivotal, of course, because it's at the heart of what we're talking about, which is the Lord's Supper, we don't need to detain ourselves here, because throughout the journey, we have been relating each step along the way to the Lord's Supper. And so, we come to the Lord's Supper itself. Jesus, on the eve of His death as the Passover lamb, on the eve of pouring out His blood for and in the place of many, gathers His disciples in the upper room to participate in two meals, or arguably in one meal that fulfills two distinct purposes. He gathers them to celebrate the Passover, as He expressly states, and we've already commented on. He gathers that they would participate together in a meal that served as a ceremony of covenant renewal, celebrating God's deliverance of His people from Egypt and, indeed, throughout history. But He also gathers His disciples to inaugurate the new covenant in His blood for the forgiveness of sins. And so, here we have that described for us in Matthew's gospel. Well, back on the train. Briefer stops now. We're heading to Aberdeen, our penultimate stop on our journey. We come to Aberdeen today, 13th of January, 2013.

Today, we as God's people will celebrate in the Lord's Supper, and we do so by the express command of our Lord, whose blood was shed in our place for the forgiveness of our sins. We do so because Jesus, as recorded for us by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, established that we are to participate in the Lord's Supper until He comes. That's language we're familiar with from the account in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. What do we do as we participate? What will we do as we participate this morning? Well, what we will do this morning is that we will renew the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus at the first Lord's Supper, as we've already established. We will participate in a ceremony of covenant renewal, but of the new covenant that has been established in the blood of Jesus. Back on the train, and we head to our final stop. We head to our destination in this sweep of redemptive history. We head to heaven, or certainly to the new heavens and the new earth.

We said at the beginning that we would travel from Passover to Parousia, or the appearing of Jesus, and we're nearly there. But what is the connection between the second coming of Jesus, the appearing of Jesus, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth with the Lord's Supper? What's the connection? At each point of the way, we've been able, I hope, to establish the connection. But what about the connection at this final stop? Well, at the very beginning, we noticed how in verse 29 in Matthew's gospel, Jesus explicitly speaks of that day, of a future occasion when He would eat and drink with His disciples. What occasion is He speaking about? Well, He is speaking of the great banquet that will take place on His return, a banquet that God had already anticipated through the prophet Isaiah.

[31 : 01] Jesus is picking up on a truth that God had, perhaps not with the clarity that now becomes apparent, but that God had anticipated through His prophet. In Isaiah chapter 25 and verse 6, we read, On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats, and the finest of wines. On this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. And so, Isaiah here prophetically speaks of this same great and last day, where there will be this great banquet prepared by God for His people.

The very same banquet that the Apostle John saw in his vision, as is recorded for us in Revelation and chapter 19, and reading from verse 6, Hallelujah! For our Lord Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen and bright and clean was given her to wear. Then, reading from verse 9, Then the angel said to me, Write, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

You see, this is the occasion, this is the banquet that Jesus is speaking of as He closes His participation with His disciples as He speaks of drinking again, drinking anew of the fruit of the vine with His disciples in my Father's kingdom. At that banquet, all of God's people will gather and eat and drink with Jesus as we celebrate all that God is and all that God has done for us. And you are invited to that banquet, my friend, just as surely as you are invited to the Lord's table this morning.

There are many adjectives that we could rightly apply to God's family, to the church of Jesus Christ, but one that most certainly applies is that we are a celebrating people. We are invited by God to eat, drink, drink, and be merry, from the simple Passover meal in Egypt, to the meal enjoyed on Mount Sinai, to the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, to this morning in Bonacord, to the wedding banquet of the Lamb, the Passover Lamb, in the new heavens and the new earth. Praise God for such an invitation.

And so I say to you, people of God, come on and celebrate, celebrate and sing, celebrate and sing, and eat and drink to the King, to our covenant King, King Jesus. Let us pray.