

The Lord's Supper Written by Matt Krick

Mars Hill celebrates the Lord's Supper by gathering together as the community of the redeemed in Jesus to rejoice and reflect on what He has accomplished for us by His atoning work on the cross. We celebrate the Lord's Supper at different times during the year as a corporate body of believers. The Scriptures do not explicitly state how often the Lord's Supper should be celebrated, rather that we are to do it in remembrance of Jesus every time we do so. At Mars Hill, we have a deep desire to see smaller communities of people celebrating the Lord's Supper in unique ways. We encourage you to celebrate the Lord's Supper together as priests in His Kingdom [1 Peter 2:5, Exodus 19:6] as often as your community feels led to do so. The following information will be helpful to you as you seek to explore what the Lord's Supper is and how to experience it together.

Remembrance and Hope

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me" [1 Corinthians 11:24-25]. In our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we should take time to reflect and remember. Reflection is a lost art in our culture; it was central, however, in the culture of Judaism. God was continually telling the Israelites to remember what He had done for them. Most often God tells the Israelites to remember that they were once in bondage and slavery to Egypt and He delivered them. The first Passover was practiced as a symbol of their deliverance from this slavery. The people were required to be in their homes with their families, kill a spotless lamb and wipe its blood on the doorpost. Every household in Egypt that did not have the blood on their doorpost would have their firstborn child killed. God said, "The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you" [Exodus 12:13]. The blood signified God's covenant relationship with Israel and that He would keep his word by bringing them out of slavery in Egypt. After God brought His people out of Egypt He required them to celebrate the Passover once a year, sacrificing a lamb and remembering the day that God passed over their homes, sparing their firstborn and delivering them from the hands of the Egyptians. [See the Passover story in Exodus 11 and 12].

God's deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians was one of His great redeeming acts. His greatest act of redemption, however, came through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came as the Passover sacrificial lamb to shed His blood, the blood of the covenant, to take away the sins of the world [Matthew 26:28]. We rejoice in His suffering because of what it accomplished and what it continues to accomplish as we long for His redemption to come to fulfillment in the restoration of all things in heaven and on earth.

Before Jesus died on the cross He instituted His supper as a picture of what He was about to do by His sacrificial death on the cross. His command is very similar to the Passover meal being instituted by God before He brought the Israelites up out of Egypt. Therefore, as the Passover is celebrated to remember what God had done for the Israelites, we celebrate the Lord's Supper to remember what Christ accomplished for us. We gather to participate in Christ's life, His teachings, His sufferings, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His glory. We symbolically enter the story of our Lord, experiencing His life flowing through us. We encounter Jesus as we partake of Him; eating and drinking of Him, for He is our life sustenance, He is the bread of life and water that gives life. We celebrate this as we partake in His supper with other believers. As we partake, we recognize the rich pictures He has given us in the bread and the wine. The bread is a picture of Christ's body, which He gave for us, and the wine is a picture of Christ's blood, which was shed for us. The Lord's Supper is a picture of the bleeding body of Christ and the broken heart of God taking the consequence of our sin and communicating to us the forgiveness of sin in the bread and wine. We confess that there is something profoundly mysterious, even mystical, that we do not pretend to have the words to explain about this encounter with Christ.

In this act of remembering, the Holy Spirit renews us to discipleship and strengthens us for living as Christ's followers in our covenant with God and others and our participation in the community of faith. Remembering what Christ has done should lead us to a longing and hope for what He will do. It is Christ's sacrifice on the cross that points to Shalom, or the completion of all things. Jesus said, "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" [Matthew 26:29]. After Jesus tells us to remember Him, He gives us something to hope for in the future; a hunger that drives us to live as He called us to live, eagerly awaiting the completion of His redemption. The day is coming when we will feast with Christ. Jesus will come to complete the work He started and we will forever dwell with the Lord in a new and restored creation. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of where we are in God's great story. We stand in a time between Christ's first coming and His second. We do this "until He comes." We believe in the one who lived for us, died for us, and rose for us. We long for Him to return soon.

The Lord's Supper as a Relational Celebration

We were created to live in right relationships with God, others, and creation. The tragedy of the fall has broken all of these relationships. The Lord's Supper points us toward these right relationships and our role as participants in restoring these relationships.

At His supper, Christ is host and His disciples gather in communion with Him and each other. It is a profoundly communal event; meant to be experienced as we celebrate the Messiah, Jesus, and His presence amongst His body, the church. Christ is present and we participate in Him and have communion with our risen Lord [1 Corinthians 10:16]. Fellow believers are also present as we participate in the Lord's Supper [1 Corinthians 10:17]. This is why the Lord's Supper is often referred to as "communion," because the community is coming together in union with Jesus to celebrate what He has done for us, not me. We are called to live in shared relationships with Christ and each other, experiencing the kingdom now. The kingdom life is life together as brothers and sisters in Christ living in right relationship. The communion of saints joins communion with Christ in the kingdom life now. The Lord's Supper is a testimony of our lives together in Jesus. This union with Christ and His church displays our identity in Christ and not in the things of the world.

The Lord's Supper is also a knitting together of the ruptured relationship with creation, which is groaning in anticipation of its restoration [Romans 8:18-23]. Creation is represented in the supper by the bread and the wine revealing Christ's connectedness to the earth, His creation, as He is pictured in these elements. As we partake, we anticipate our union with the new heaven and new earth, restored in Christ.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper is a participation in the Kingdom of God. We celebrate our union with Christ, with others, and with creation, as we long for the fulfillment of God's Kingdom to speed its coming.

Preparation-Can You Drink the Cup?

The Lord's Supper requires that we be ready to experience it. Whether or not we are prepared to take the Lord's Supper won't determine the presence of Christ, but it will impact how His presence will be made known and felt each of us. We are called to examine our hearts before the Lord, relying on the Spirit of truth to convict us of areas in our lives that have fallen short of right relationships, to have a deep and true repentance and to embrace the freedom Christ gives us from our sin. Remembering what Jesus has done and placing our hope in Him requires a response of joyful obedience to Him in every area of life. This is a life lived by faith in Christ, embodying His love.

In Matthew 20 when the sons of Zebedee, James and John, requested to sit at Jesus' left and right in the kingdom, He responded by asking them, "You don't know what you are asking...Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" [v.22]. Both men were willing to drink the cup, but they were not ready. James and John were in for a surprise on what the cup that Jesus referred to is all about.

Jesus' cup is the cup of sorrow. Not just His own, but that of the whole human race. Before His death, Jesus told His disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" [Matthew 26:38]. He then prayed to the Father, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" [v.39]. Jesus, filled with grief, asks the Father if there is any other way to bring redemption. He could not stand the thought of taking the sins of the world upon Himself and being separated from the Father during that time on the cross. The Father's perfect will was best however, and Jesus went to the cross with joy, knowing what it would accomplish [Hebrews 12:2].

Yes, there is joy hidden in the sorrows, and often times it is great joy. We find joy in the suffering of Christ's death by His forgiveness of sins, victory over death, and His resurrected and glorified body. Jesus turns the cup of God's wrath into a Eucharist, that is a cup of joy, blessing, yearning, and thanksgiving [1 Corinthians 10:16]. This is the mystery-Christ died, so that we might live!

Jesus invites us to drink the cup of salvation with Him, to share in His sufferings and to share in His joy. You cannot drink the cup in individual isolation. The joys and sorrows must be shared in community [Romans 12:15]. It is in our shared relationships that joys and sorrows are realized, those of Jesus, those of the community, and those of the world. The greatest healing of our sorrows takes place in a community of Jesus' lovers where true joy is revealed. Living a complete life in Christ includes drinking the cup in community until it is empty, trusting that God will fill it with everlasting life!

Can you drink the cup? Taking this question seriously will radically change our lives. Can we drink the cup that Jesus drank? Can we live as He did and be willing to die as He did? Henri Nouwen says,

It is the question that has the power to crack open a hardened heart and lay bare the tendons of the spiritual life. Can you drink the cup? Can you empty it to the dregs? Can you taste all the sorrows and joys? Can you live your life to the full whatever it will bring?...Drinking the cup that Jesus drank is living a life in and with the Spirit of Jesus, which is the Spirit of unconditional love. The intimacy between Jesus and Abba, his Father, is an intimacy of complete trust, in which there are no power games...It is only love-pure, unrestrained, and unlimited love. Completely open, completely free. That intimacy gave Jesus the strength to drink his cup. That same intimacy Jesus wants to give us so that we can drink ours. That intimacy has a Name, a Divine Name. It is called Holy Spirit. Living a spiritual life is living a life in which the Holy Spirit will guide us and give us the strength and courage to keep saying yes to the great question.

Suggested Scripture Passages to read when taking the Lord's Supper together:

-Matthew 26:26-29

-Mark 14:22-25

-Luke 22:17-20

-John 6:25-29

-1 Corinthians 10:14-22

-1 Corinthians 11:23-34