

Past, Present and Future: The Four Meals of the Lord's Supper

We're going to talk about the Lord's Supper, and about time. The past, the present, and the future: the four meals of the Lord's Supper. Our Christian faith finds many ways to bring the past and the future into our present. We live today always hanging on to the past, especially Christ's first coming, and we live today holding on to the future, especially Christ's second coming.

The Lord's Supper ties us to three other meals, and in that way ties us to the past and the future. We'll begin with the Lord's Supper.

Who are the guests at the Lord's supper, and who is the host? We are his guests, and the Lord Jesus is our host. "Lord's Supper" does not mean the supper to *remember* the Lord, or the supper *about* the Lord. It means above all that the Lord arranges the room, the Lord arranges the food, and he invites the guests. The Lord is always leads this meal, he is always at the head of the table passing out food and drink, and we are always *his* guests.

And then, in one of the most startling twists ever, Jesus himself is also the food and drink. *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant.*

"Take and eat, this bread is my body. Drink from this cup, all of you; this is my blood." Jesus, the host, in a sense gets up gets onto the table, onto the plate and into the cup, and he himself becomes our food and our drink. He's still there leading the meal.

But in some entirely real way, he is also our food and our drink. Materially, it is still bread and wine. But reality is more than material. Spiritually, we feed on Jesus when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper, we take in material food, and in this we also take to ourselves the ultimate spiritual food.

The Lord Jesus is never as physically present with us as when we have the Lord's Supper. He's here, inviting us to his table, offering us the bread and the cup, and he's here in the actual bread and drink.

Jesus says, "I want *you* to come to *my* table, be a guest at *my* table. I will be your food and your drink." I have been trying to get my head around these simple words for more than 45 years, and have not gotten much farther than amazement.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, however and whenever we do that, we unavoidably join ourselves to another meal. There are four accounts of the *Last* Supper in the New Testament, one each in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul.

The Bible has no way to teach us about the *Lord's* Supper except to repeat the *Last* Supper. That's all we have. At our *Lord's* Supper, we read one of these *Last* Supper accounts. Paul's in 1 Cor 11 is most common; I am using Matthew tonight.

And at the *Last* Supper, Jesus arranged the room, he arranged the food and other details, and he invited the twelve as his guests. This happened in Jerusalem, on the night he was betrayed. Jesus had many Galilean followers in Jerusalem at that time, perhaps 200 men and women who traveled with him. But Jesus only invited the twelve to this meal. And now he invites us as well.

When we guide our *Lord's* Supper by recounting the *Last* Supper, we join them there in the upper room. It's as if the Lord brings in more tables, and calls us in, too.

We listen along with the twelve as Jesus explains his death as a death for them, a death to give life to them. We join the twelve in their bewilderment at the Lord's words, and with them we eat the bread and drink the cup, because Jesus told us to.

In our meal, we re-enact that meal, we have that meal again. But the *Last* Supper was itself bound to a much earlier meal, the *Passover*. As our *Lord's* Supper recalls the *Last* Supper that Jesus had with the twelve, so the *Last* Supper recalled the *Passover* Supper that the Israelites celebrated under Moses when they were still in Egypt.

The Gospel writers all tell us that the *Last* Supper was the Jewish *Passover* Meal. In Luke, Jesus told the twelve, "I have been very eager to eat this *Passover* with you, before I suffer." Paul does not mention "Passover" in his *Lord's* Supper paragraph, but earlier in 1 Corinthians he wrote, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." We also have a Passover Lamb.

So at our *Lord's* Supper, we are carried back to Exodus 12. The Israelites were in bondage and slavery in Egypt, but God was on the move! Nine plagues had come and gone, and the tenth would happen that night. The destroying angel would kill every firstborn male in Egypt, humans and animals.

As Moses instructed, every Israelite household killed a lamb, roasted it, and ate it. They took the blood of the lamb and painted it on the top and sides of the door frame.

They ate the Passover with their coat tucked into their belt, their walking shoes on their feet, walking sticks at hand, ready to walk, ready to move. "Eat in haste," said Moses, "because we're leaving." That night, God judged the Egyptians, and God led his people out of bondage and toward the promised land. They would be on the move before morning.

At the *Last* Supper, Jesus and the twelve were putting themselves back there in Egypt, they were remembering that last Passover meal in Egypt, the Israelites last supper in Egypt.

Jesus and the twelve were eating roasted lamb and unleavened bread because they were recalling that earlier evening, and they were remembering and celebrating what God did at that first Passover.

So when we celebrate the *Lord's Supper*, we recall the *Last Supper*, but the Bible says the *Last Supper* was the *Passover* meal, so we find ourselves joining those Israelites in Egypt, their last supper in Egypt, eating at the beginning of the exodus, the journey into the promised land.

At the original Passover supper in Egypt, the Israelites ate the sacrifice. They killed and roasted the sacrificed lamb. And the way they took the benefits of that Passover sacrifice to themselves was to actually eat the lamb, and to paint the lamb's blood on the door frame.

That's how they applied the sacrificed lamb to themselves. That's how they took the sacrifice to themselves. If they just killed the lamb, but did not eat the meat or paint the blood on the door, the sacrifice did them no good.

So at the *Last Supper*, the disciples already assume they will eat the sacrifice. Jesus in effect says to them: "That meat over there, that we're eating, is the *Passover lamb's* body. This *bread* is *my* body. In Egypt, they painted the *lamb's* blood on the door frame. Now, this cup is *my* blood. Drink from it, all of you."

At the Last Supper, there are two Passover lambs on the table to be eaten, the Jewish lamb, and Jesus the Lamb. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.

Detour: Imagine an unbeliever in a church that was having the Lord's Supper, and was using Matthew, the Scripture I read earlier. This unbeliever is ready to believe, ready to trust in God and follow Jesus. This unbeliever listens to the church leader read what Jesus said: "Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The unbeliever thinks, "that's just what I want. I want covenant with God, and I want forgiveness of sins. I'm going to eat this bread and drink this cup." If I was there, I would want to say to this person, "that's not how it works."

But this person who wants to follow the Lord does not know that. This person thinks Jesus meant it just as he said it. "Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." By eating and drinking in that way, that person would be saved. What a great way to come to the Lord! The detour is now over.

Christ is *our* Passover lamb, and *we* are on an exodus out of bondage and into God's promised land. We do not just *remember* those Israelites in *their* last meal in Egypt, we are in the same place. God has acted for us, and is leading us out. Our Lord's Supper takes us to the first Passover, because we also have a Passover lamb.

The four meals of the Lord's Supper. The first meal is the original Passover meal eaten in Egypt. The second meal is the Last Supper, Jesus and the twelve. The third meal is our Lord's Supper, however and whenever we have that. The fourth meal is yet to come.

In Matthew, right after his words about the cup of covenant blood, Jesus says: "I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus joins the future kingdom banquet, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, to his words about the bread and the cup.

The bread and the cup aim us at the fourth meal. Jesus built the fourth meal into his explanation of the bread and the cup.

In Luke, Jesus says: *I will not eat this Passover again, until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.* (2x). The Passover is not yet fulfilled. That was new to me. God was promising something, back there in Exodus, something that has still not happened. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb will also be a Passover Meal. Together with Jesus, we will eat and drink the *fulfillment* of Passover.

All four of these meals are in Passover meals, the first one in Exodus, the Last Supper with Jesus and the twelve, our Lord's Supper when we celebrate our Passover lamb, and the future meal with Jesus that finally fulfills the Passover. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, thank you for the bread and the cup. May it never grow old. Keep feeding us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.