

## Acts 2:40-47

### The Breaking of Bread

**Introduction:** We've been looking for the last few weeks at the early church and their devoted commitment to their new identity in Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

We talked extensively about how the early Church was enamored with the Jesus story - It had cut so deeply to their hearts that the whole of their lives were radically changed.

When the Gospel (what Jesus did when he gave himself for you) becomes the defining reality of your life you look at everything differently. As we saw a few weeks ago when Jesus comes in to your life with transforming power you get a new freedom, a new identity and community, a new power and new way of seeing the world. As Paul said, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”**

Luke tells us that this New Life expressed itself in a whole life devotion to the Jesus story - these people came together everyday to learn more about the Jesus story, to practice the Jesus way of living (self sacrificial service to others), to the breaking of bread (remembering Jesus substitutionary death) and to take advantage of the Jesus story through prayer.

This morning we want to look at their devotion to The Breaking of Bread.

#### 1. What is The Breaking of Bread?

1. The Breaking of Bread refers to the fact that the early church was a communal church, they gathered together often, even daily. We are told they ate their bread with generosity and simplicity, they shared in meals together, they were like a family as we saw and talked about last week. But more importantly it wasn't that they were like a family but what this family centered around, or who this family centered around - it was a Gospel family, a Gospel community. Luke calling this The Breaking of Bread is most definitely a reference to the Church's practice of remembering the Last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, the one we now call The Lord's Supper, Eucharist or Communion ( I will use the term The Lord's Supper to avoid confusion with the different terms). Luke

records it in his gospel account. **"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."**

2. In the Gospel of John we actually have the clearest explanation of what the Communion meal signifies. Jesus said, **"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."** -John 6:51-56
3. Let me first say that when the Church got together the center of their attention was always the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for their sakes. It was most likely very different than the way we take the Lord's supper today. Their's 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.

4. Our practice is much different in outward context. We are not in someone's house, there is no meal being served, and some of you might still even be curious or confused as to why we eat a little bit of cracker, and have the smallest glass of juice in the world as a part of our Sunday morning ritual of worship. So let's talk about this and hopefully we will capture the powerful significance of this practice, and be changed through it. I believe the Lord's Supper points backwards, inward, forward and outward.

## 2. It Points Backwards.

1. Jesus told us, "**Do this is remembrance of me.**" It is plainly 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, writhing 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 act of the Lord's Supper to remember God's most powerful display of salvation and love, where he gave himself for our sins. Again, the act of taking and eating the broken bread and drinking the cup of wine 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.
2. **It is finished** - These were the words that Jesus spoke before he died on the cross. Jesus suffered for you (he says that multiple times in the Luke passage - "For you"), it is finished. He bore all of your sin, all of my 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.
3. **Self Beaters** - Our shame, our inability to measure up has been filled up by Christ. You can't receive Jesus' salvation and then add to it. Each of us are tempted in so many ways to add to it, maybe not purposefully or even knowingly. But we do it through beating

ourselves up or through trying to prove ourselves....every time you're criticized you your devastated beat yourself up. You can't forgive yourself. Things you did in your past you are still living in the guilt and condemnation of that. Jesus says to you, I was beaten up, I paid for your sins. Is that not enough? It is finished. How dare you hate yourself and loathe yourself if you are a Christian, don't you know what Christ has done for you?

4. **Self Provers** - some of you are so proud of your accomplishments, they give you a sense of worth and identity.. This are just fig leaves (Adam and Eve's attempt to hide their shame from God and each other) stop trying to prove yourself to God and to others. You never will. You'll never be able to keep up the charade. And here is the greatest thing ever, you don't have to because Jesus measured up for you! He was perfectly faithful to God, he was the Perfect man, the perfect sacrifice. God knows everything about you and still loves you, you are accepted as you are, and any attempt/works to make yourself more lovely by your human accomplishments only takes away from what Christ has done. The Lord's supper isn't about self beating or self approving but about remembering that our salvation is accomplished, it is finished. The Lord's supper is about resting in the finished work of Christ.

1. 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!

### **3. It Points Inward**

1. The act of the Lord's Supper points inward to our hearts, centering 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, physicalized, individualized, simplified, and concretized, 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 humanize and personalize his coming to us and to particularize our coming to him....The Lord's Supper is a repeated Altar Call to ongoing conversion, to fresh commitments and entrustments of oneself to the Lord Jesus Christ, The Bread of Life" -Bruner

2. The Lord's Supper helps the Church remain Christ centered...every week 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."
3. But what does it mean to remember? Does it simply mean we shouldn't 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's being remembered.
4. 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.
  1. 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'll never be greatly shaken)
5. The Lord's Supper is the opportunity or invitation to trust/ believe (in a physical way) by weekly reorienting our lives around him, making him the center of our universe, making him our home, making him our sole identity.

#### 4. It Points Forward

1. 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.**"

2. 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 summarizes Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, the feast also looks ahead to the feast in the Kingdom.
3. 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."
4. 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 labor 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
5. The Lord's Supper is a small picture of the justice that characterizes the coming of the kingdom of God, where none will go hungry because of poverty or alienated labor. 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.

## **5. In Points Outward - to be reconciled to one another**

1. 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.
2. 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 - great and small - sin, that is ultimately an offense to God, withhold forgiveness from one another?

3. 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
5. 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 plowshares 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.
6. Not that we ever perfect this in our lifetime for 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 want to love, forgive and be reconciled to one another.

**Conclusion:** I pray that we become more and more a church that centers 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 centering 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.