

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

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It was getting late, so I went downstairs to grab my book so I could read and settle down for the night. Sarah then graciously reminded me that I had told her I would take out the trash. So, I got up to do that, and then I got a buzz on my watch. It was Frank asking me a question. I then went hunting for my phone to respond. As I was responding, a reminder on my phone popped up at the top of the screen. It was a reminder to pay the electric bill. I then got a notification from my Atlanta Braves app that the score was tied in the bottom of the 9th. As I raced to turn on the TV, my boss John was calling. Of course, I had to answer it. And to think, all that and I didn't read a page of my book, didn't take the trash out, forgot to answer Frank's text, didn't pay the electric bill, and didn't watch the game. We live in a world of distractions and forgetfulness abound in our everyday world and also in our Christian life. There are so many things that vie for our attention and focus. Many of them are good things, but they are not the most important thing. They are not the main thing.

When I worked at summer camp out in Texas, one of the things that they beat in our heads was that we are to "Keep the main thing the main thing." It wasn't because other things weren't important (your view on the end times, etc.), but they would distract us from what is most important. But what is the main thing. When it comes to the Christian life or life in general for that matter, what is the main thing? I am glad you asked! This morning we are starting a new sermon series on the Lord's Supper called "The Feast." At Perry Creek, we practice two of what can be called ordinances, which is a fancy word for two practices that Jesus ordained and that the church is commanded to practice. The two are baptism and the Lord's Supper. In this sermon series, we are going to discuss the Lord's Supper or what is also biblically known as the Lord's Table, Communion, or Eucharist. I don't believe I will use the word Eucharist this morning, but I will use the others to all refer to the same thing.

Communion is a big deal at Perry Creek. In fact, it is such a big deal that we practice it every month. If you think about the Lord's Supper from an outsider's perspective, it could seem a little strange. "So let me get this straight...they might say, you come to a table and take bread and juice, in our case, and say that it represents the body and blood of Jesus, and then you eat it?" Yeah, I can see how that might be strange to those outside the church.

In this series, we are going to talk about what all this is about and why it is so important as a church to participate in the Lord's Supper often. So why do we practice the Lord's Supper every month? Short answer: to keep the main thing the main thing. To help us this morning, we are going to ask ourselves several questions. To start with:

Where did the Lord's Supper come from?

Where does it come from? Where do we even get the idea? One thing that I am super excited about this morning is that we get to take a journey together, a journey through Scripture. If you

have every doubted in the authority of Scripture or how we can know it is true, I hope this morning can encourage you to see that God's Word is powerful, his promises are true from eternity past to eternity future, and we can bank our lives on it.

We are going to start our journey at the beginning of the Bible in the book of Exodus, so if you have a bible please turn to Exodus 12. If you have a Bible, flip through with me! I want you to imagine being an Israelite at this time in history. For 430 years, you have been slaves to the Egyptians. 430 years! To keep that in perspective, the US has been a nation for 243 years.

If you are living at this time, you are wondering if slavery would ever come to an end. Then some guys named Moses and Aaron come along and say it is about to end. God is going to come and save you and you are no longer going to be slaves in Egypt. After Moses had asked Pharaoh to release God's people, he refuses. So, he sent ten plagues that caused great suffering to the Egyptians, like turning water to blood and killing of livestock. The last plague was the worst one of all. God was going to kill every firstborn son in Egypt. That's where we pick up the story. God has a plan for Israel to allow for them to be saved from this plague of death:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 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. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover meal:

"No foreigner may eat it

- Exodus 12:1-43

God was about to do something amazing. He was about to deliverer the Israelites from slavery, but he wanted them to do something first. He wanted them to have a meal. I believe the theme of a meal is significant in the Bible. That is why we named the series The Feast, because this idea of a meal is sown all throughout the Bible.

Meals are an opportunity for us to stop in our busy distracted world. Meals give a chance for us to stop and be in relationship, to share life, give a sense of stability, comfort, belonging, deepen relationships.

God commanded a meal, and we will see this throughout our journey this morning, a meal with specific instructions. They were to take a male lamb, or goat, that was a year old. That lamb could not have any defects, not spotted or lame. It had to be perfect. They were commanded to kill the lamb and then do something a little strange with its blood. They were to take the blood and spread it on the doorpost of the house that they were eating the meal. Then they were to sit and eat a meal. They were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were to eat it dressed and ready to walk out the door at any moment. God was going to send them out of Egypt, finally.

If they obeyed God and trusted Him with this plan, then they would be saved from death, and God would deliver his people from the slavery of the Egyptians. God had a plan, a purpose, for all of this. That night God used the blood and sacrifice of a lamb to save his people from death. That night God delivered his people from being slaves in Egypt for 430 years. Every year God commanded Israel, and only Israel, to eat the Passover meal.

This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.

- Exodus 12:14

This was to remind them of God's deliverance of them from slavery and how He saved them by the blood of the lamb. They had be constantly reminded of God and what he had done for them to save them. They had to constantly be reminded of the main thing, the salvation that was given to them from God.

Where did the Lord's Supper come from? The Lord's Supper came from the Passover Meal. A thousand years later, Jesus enters the scene and changes the Passover Meal. Let's turn to Luke 22 to answer our next question, which is:

How did Jesus Change the Passover Meal?

When I was a kid growing up in Sylacauga, Alabama, I remember a table that looked similar to this sitting on the floor right below the pulpit. On the table, it read these words "Do This in Remembrance of Me." I remember not really understanding why this was written on the table. What did this mean. Do what? In remembrance of who? As a kid, this table was quite confusing. In Luke 22, we see the meaning behind why my church as a kid had a table with those words:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a

jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there. "They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

- Luke 22:7-13

The Israelites obeyed God and hundreds of years later they were still celebrating the Passover every year. This helped Israel keep the main thing the main thing. To remind them of how God delivered them from death and slavery. But Jesus was about to change the Passover forever.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. He said to them "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

- Luke 22:14-20

So here are the disciples gathered for a meal. They are eating the Passover and then Jesus does something they would not have ever expected. An ordinance that the Israelites had done for hundreds of years Jesus was about to change. This meal that once was reminded the Israelites about the Passover, Jesus was about to change it to be about Himself.

The Bible says as the disciples were eating Jesus took the bread. Jesus said that the bread represented his body, his body that was given for you, a body that was arrested, spit on, beaten, whipped, thorns shoved in his head, a body that was nailed to a cross, a body that on the cross bore the full wrath of God, a body that was killed, a body that was given for you,

Jesus then took the cup and said this is my blood, which is poured out for you. Jesus is saying for hundreds of years you have remembered the blood of a spotless, perfect lamb. To be saved, you had to place that blood on the doorpost. They had a whole sacrificial system set up that had people come and sacrifice animals. For hundreds of years, you had to go and make sacrifices at a temple because of your sins.

Jesus is saying all that is no longer needed. I am here. I am the true lamb of God, the one that John the Baptist proclaimed when he saw Jesus "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." I am the perfect lamb as I have never sinned. My blood will save you from not physical death, like the plague of death in Exodus, but spiritual death, my blood will release from not physical slavery from the Egyptians but slavery from your sins. My blood has come and it has been shed for you.

The sacrifice of the Passover Lamb was no longer needed. Jesus, the true Lamb of God, had

come to take away the sins of the world. We have seen where the Lord's Supper originated. We have seen how Jesus instituted it and changed it forever. But now we come to the main question we have to ask this morning:

What does that mean for us?

In Jesus' words "Do this in remembrance of me" and in the early church, we see that the Lord's Supper was to be practiced regularly by the church.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- Luke 22:23-26

Pastor John, in the next couple of weeks will focus more on Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians, but one thing is clear. The church obeyed Jesus' command and would come to the table regularly to remind themselves to keep the main thing the main thing. The gospel of Jesus Christ. His body that was given for you and his blood that was shed for you so that you can be forgiven of your sins.

In a world and culture full of distractions, we need to gather regularly and remind ourselves about what is most important. A truth that we never grow from and a truth that we always come back to. We need to keep the main thing the main thing. We need the gospel every day.

"Why do you preach the gospel every week? Because every week we forget it."

- Martin Luther

I have said this before, but I am going to say it again. I believed for so long that the gospel was something that got me into a relationship with God and then I moved on to other things. (Focusing on being a better husband, father, pastor, son) NOOO. We never ever graduate from the gospel. How we grow as a Christian is that we grow more in the understanding of the gospel and learn to live more and more in the realities of it. As Keller says, the gospel is not the ABCs of Christianity. It is the A-Z of Christianity.

The gospel is what everything else is built around. You keep the gospel the main thing, and everything flows from that. A way that Jesus Himself ordained for us to help us keep the main thing the main thing is a meal. This table. A meal to come remind ourselves of the most important thing in our lives. The gospel. But this table isn't for everybody. Which brings us to our next question:

Who can participate in the Lord's Supper?

One thing we see from the beginning is that this meal is only for the people of God. In Exodus, God says outsiders could not participate. We see in Corinthians that it is only the body of Christ, the church, that can come to the table.

That is why you will hear John or I say, when we are leading Communion that if you are a follower of Christ this table is for you. If you have placed your faith in Christ for salvation and believe his blood was shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, then you are welcome. But if you don't believe that, this table is not for you.

That is not to be a practice of hate but of love. It is to say to the person who is not in Christ, you are missing out. You are missing out on this feast of salvation! You don't want to miss out on this family meal. A meal where we feast on the truths of the gospel and how we are forever forgiven of our sins? Come to Jesus today!

But believer this is a table that is for you. A great feast. All this coming to the table and remembering the gospel can seem a little vague. How do we remind ourselves of the main thing, the gospel, in the Lord's Supper, what are we doing exactly.

What are we doing when we come to the Lord's Table? I believe we do four things when we come to the table. How do you remember things in church? You alliterate: (Either I am a genius or he needs better stuff). We remember, we reflect, we renew, we rejoice.

Remember: At the Lord's Supper we come and first remember what Christ has done for us. Just as the Israelites in the Passover came to remember what God had done for them in saving them, just as Jesus said "Do This in Remembrance of Me," we are to remember what Jesus has done for us. Remember that you were a sinner, destined to spend an eternity in hell. Then you were bought by the blood of Jesus. Jesus gave his body. Jesus shed his blood for you, personally. He loves you so much that he bore all the wrath of God that you deserve. Don't forget it! Don't forget the greatest news in the whole world. Don't forget what Jesus has done for you. You don't have to do anything. You don't have to earn anything. Jesus has died for you, and it is finished! Oh, what great news the gospel is. Oh, may we keep the main thing the main thing.

Reflect: As we come to the Lord's table, it is a great time for us to reflect on our own lives. 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 is a verse John will look at in more detail. It says this:

"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

- 1 Corinthians 11:27-28

The Lord's Supper is a time to examine our lives and reflect on our personal walk with Jesus. Are there sins that we need to confess to him? Are there any relationships in the body of Christ

that need to be mended? John will talk more about what the table means as a body of Christ, but we both reflect on our individual relationship with Christ, as well as our relationships with each other.

Confession is an important part of the gospel. Seeing the sin in our lives and bringing that to God. We see our need for God. We see our sin, but we also see how much his love and grace is for us.

But quickly turn your reflecting on your sin to reflecting on the cross. In the gospel, we do not dwell on our sin and wallow in guilt and shame. The cross removes that from us. There is no more room for guilt, no more room for shame, no more room for the wrath of God. Jesus has taken that all upon himself it.

Renew: As mentioned when we started, we are forgetful people. As we come to the Lord's Table, may it be an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to Jesus and be renewed by the power of His Spirit.

When I was a kid, I had a big misunderstanding about salvation. I must have asked Jesus to come into my heart and be my savior a hundred times. OK, this is not that. This is not you becoming a Christian again, but just simply refocusing your attention to Jesus. Daily, we sin, and daily I need Jesus to renew me in him.

Early this week I was having an awful day. My heart was just not in a good place. I was getting frustrated easily, and I just was very vulnerable to sin. In that moment of seeing the wickedness of my heart, I saw my need for Jesus. I needed to, in a sense, renew myself in Him. I was driving and so I just simply pulled over the car in the back of a parking lot and prayed. I needed Jesus! I needed to be filled by him, by his spirit, to forgive me of my sin and to help me to walk in righteousness. Can I tell you something? God showed up. For the rest of the day, my attitude was changed. God in his grace renewed me in Him. I was super stressed about everything I had to get done and the sermon I needed to write, but God gave me such peace. Come to the table and renew your commitment to Christ and come to be filled by Him!

Rejoice: Once you remember what Christ has done for you, after you have reflected on your sin and the cross that has taken that sin, after you have been renewed in Him. Guess what just flows from you. Are you not getting excited about this??!! Worship/praise flows from you! Rejoice,

"O praise the one who paid my debt, who raised this life up from the grave".

"Oh what a savior, isn't he wonderful, sing hallelujah Christ is risen, bow down before him, for he is lord of all, sing hallelujah Christ is risen."

O come to the table and find your joy in Christ. Come to the table and worship him for who He is, what he has done for you, and (Don't forget this part), what he will do in Christ.

This morning we started seeing the people of God coming to the table in the Passover in Exodus. We then went to the gospels where we saw Jesus changed the meal of the Passover to the Lord's Table. We saw in Corinthians how the New Testament church obeyed Jesus' command and regularly participated in the Lord's Supper. This is not the last meal Jesus will eat with his people.

Remember in Luke when Jesus sat down with his disciples in the upper room:

And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

- Luke 22:15-16

We see that coming to pass:

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad^[SEP] and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come,^[SEP] and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) *Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

- Revelation 19:6-9

Just as the Passover was to point to Old Testament people of God to Christ and his first coming, the Lord's Supper is to ultimately point us to the second coming of Christ.

One day we will drink with Jesus at his table at the "wedding supper of the Lamb," where all things will be made right, all things will be made new. We will see Jesus face to face. We will eat with him at his table. There will be no more sin, no more pain, no more longing, no more emptiness. It will be then at this great feast that our joy will be made full. Our Joy will be complete in Christ. Oh, how we long for that day. Rejoice in that day.

But until then, let's keep the main thing the main thing. As we come to the table, as we live our lives, may we continue to remember, reflect, renew, and rejoice in the gospel!