

THREE MEALS

Text: Luke 22:14-20

Readings: Ex 12:1-16; Luke 19:28-40, 22:7-23

Theme: The Lord's Supper fulfils the Passover and anticipates the banquet of heaven.

Purpose: To strengthen our faith and hope in Christ by understanding the past, present and future meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Eating is an important part of our lives. It's important because we need food to live; we need food and drink or we will die. But eating a meal is often a social occasion as well. When families get together for a meal, especially for dinner, there is plenty of opportunity for talking about what has happened during the day at school and work and home and what everyone did; and we talk about the plans and programme for the next day. This is even more so when we have special meals that celebrate a birthday or an anniversary or when you invite friends or family members over for a meal.

Today we are going to think about three meals. The passage we have read describes these: it looks back to the Old Testament feast of the Passover, it describes the institution of the Lord's Supper, and it looks forward to the great banquet we will share with the Lord Jesus in heaven.

1. The first meal to consider is the **PASSOVER**.

This was the meal that Jesus ate with his disciples that evening. It remembered how one night, 1400 years earlier, the angel of death had passed over the homes of the people of Israel in Egypt. They had been there for 430 years and the Pharaoh had refused to let them go. God had punished the Egyptians with nine plagues and then with a tenth one - the worst of all - in which every firstborn son in every household would die (Ex 11:5).

The people of Israel could escape this death by killing a lamb and taking the blood and putting it on the doorframe of their house. When the Angel of Death saw the blood he would pass over that house; he would see that someone had already died in that household. The lamb had died as a substitute for the firstborn, in the place of the son. (This lamb, of course, pointed ahead to Jesus.)

They were to roast the lamb and eat it, and with it they had unleavened bread. They ate their dinner standing up, with their coats and sandals on, ready to go at a moment's notice. And that very night the people were delivered - God forced Pharaoh to let them go.

A few months later they arrived at Mount Sinai. There the Lord reminded Israel of what he had done for them. He said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." In other words, the Lord had delivered his people; he had rescued them, he had saved them!

The Passover meal remembered this; it remembered how the firstborn son was delivered from death and how the entire nation of Israel had been rescued!

God wanted them to *continue* to remember this great salvation by celebrating the Passover. Every year they would kill and roast a lamb and eat unleavened bread and remember what God had done for them.

2. But this meal also looked forward - it anticipated another important meal - **THE LORD'S SUPPER**.

As Jesus prepared to have this meal with his disciples he knew that in the next 24 hours he would suffer terribly and then die. On a number of occasions he had warned his disciples about this (cf. Luke 18:31-32). So this was not unexpected, he knew this was coming.

Jesus also knew that he was the fulfilment of the Passover feast and of the Passover lamb! Just as those lambs had died instead of the firstborn son he would die in the place of those who believe in him. He was and is our substitute. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; ...the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Is 53:5,6). He is the Lamb that was slain (Rev 5:6).

With all this in mind Jesus said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (v 15). "Eagerly desired" refers to a very strong feeling, an earnest desire, a great longing.

Jesus was human. He was about to suffer and at this time he needed his disciples, he needed their support, company and encouragement. He needed his friends around him.

But Jesus was also God, and he knew the significance of this occasion; he knew he was the Passover Lamb and that after this meal with his disciples he would die, then be raised and then ascend into heaven.

This would be their last Passover together in its Old Testament sense and meaning, because in his death he would fulfil that Passover. After this the meaning and significance of the Passover would be taken up in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

So this was to be a very important meal; it marked a transition between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It was a turning point in the history of salvation; it was the transformation of one meal into another.

On that evening Jesus instituted this New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He gave them the bread of the Passover and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (v 19).

After the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (v 20). Every time they shared the bread and the wine in this way he wanted them to remember his death.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we remember that he died for his people, that he took our place, that he laid down his life for his friends, that he is "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This is what Jesus wants us to remember in this meal.

There has been a lot of debate amongst Christians about what is taking place in the Lord's Supper, but the meaning is very simple; the bread and the wine remind us that Jesus died for sinners such as us.

If you believe that Jesus died for your sins then this meal feeds and nourishes you spiritually. In the Belgic Confession Guido de Bres wrote, "This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ makes us partakers of himself with all his benefits and gives us the grace to enjoy both himself and the merit of his suffering and death. He nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and refreshes and renews them by the drinking of his blood" (BC Art 35).

When you eat a meal of potatoes and steak and peas you gain strength from that; the meal nourishes you and feeds you.

In a similar way the same way the Lord's Supper feeds you spiritually; it strengthens your faith and helps you to keep going, to persevere, to follow Jesus.

This is why Jesus commands us to do this; "Do this in remembrance of me" (v 19). This is a command, this is something we ought to do. To neglect the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sin, is disobedience to God's command.

This is also a further reason for you who are baptised members of the church to seek to profess your faith. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour then you ought to desire to take part in the Lord's Supper.

Today we think back to the Jewish celebration of the Old Testament Passover, and we remember the death of Jesus in our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

3. But we also look forward to another meal, to a **HEAVENLY BANQUET**.

Jesus mentioned this twice. He told his disciples he would not eat the Passover again "until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God (v 16).

And after he had given them the cup he said, "I tell you I will not drink this fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (v 18).

The Kingdom of God is already here but it will come fully and finally when Jesus comes again. Then this world will pass away and there will be a new world - there will be a new heaven and a new earth!

The Passover celebrated the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt; the Lord's Supper celebrates the deliverance of believers from the condemnation of sin; and the banquet we will share with Christ in heaven will celebrate our final deliverance from death and all the effects of sin.

That is something to look forward to!

We will be delivered from this ongoing struggle with our old sinful nature.

We will be freed from the attacks and temptations of Satan.

We will be set free from suffering and evil. In heaven there will be no mourning, or crying or pain; no sadness or tears; no more death because that will have been swallowed up in victory!

We will celebrate that great deliverance with a heavenly banquet! This will be a special banquet because it will be the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

After a couple have married they have a wedding banquet with their family and friends, they celebrate their marriage!

In a similar way, when Jesus comes again, all Christians will share a wedding banquet with him. That day will mark the marriage of the Church, who is the Bride, with Christ, who is the bridegroom.

We will celebrate that with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and with the entire family of God through all of history! That meal will be the beginning of the eternal joy and happiness we will share with our triune God. Are you looking forward to that day when you will be his guests at that great banquet in heaven!

In the ancient world eating together was a sign of fellowship and companionship; meals were a time of feasting and celebration and joy in each other's company.

That is still true today. Mealtimes are good occasions to get together and to talk and share our lives. At these times it is a joy to be able to share our meal with guests and to enjoy their conversation and company.

In the Lord's Supper we share a meal together, as fellow Christians, as brothers and sisters in the family of God, as members of the church of Jesus Christ.

In the meal of the Lord's Supper we look back to the Old Testament Passover, we remember the death of our Lord for us, and we look forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb!

Amen