

John 6:48-58

The Symbols of Christ The Meal

Introduction: Good morning, If this is your first time joining us - Welcome. Last week we began a four part series leading up to Easter Sunday. We are looking at the Symbols of Christ, seen in the water, the meal, the cross, and the grave.

As I mentioned last week - Symbols may not have a whole lot of cultural relevance to us but the Bible is filled with metaphor and imagery, symbolism and signs. YHWH is a rock. The name of YHWH is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are saved...Those who hope in YHWH will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.....Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches.. Whoever abides in me bears much fruit..

C.S. Lewis, in one of his essays, talked about how God did not look around the world finding ways to relate to us but has actually made the world in such a way so as to relate to us.

God - through these metaphors, symbols, signs and word pictures wants to change the way we look at the world - he wants to speak to us through the scripture of course, but also to speak the truths of scripture seen in the world around us.. he wants us to hear his word all around us; to think and see as the Biblical writers do - when you look at the skies - whether night or day - The Psalmist says, - The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the earth shows his artistry..

That is the world that the Biblical writers lived in - a world alive with the presence of God - a world shouting to us about his glory and his presence among us...

It's a beautiful and mysterious thing that God gave us these physical things to relate to us by and to minister to our souls with - he's calling to us through them - they are prophetic whispers telling us about our God - his story, his promises to us, to bring deeper understanding and connection to his story, and to incite deeper trust, deeper hope and deeper love. This is what Poetry does right? and specifically what the

Psalms and Prophets do - they don't simply tell us about God, but they tell us in such a way - They paint a picture, tell a story - that we might have a personally experience with God ourselves.

I believe that God wants to speak to us in the ordinary, everyday imagery and symbols all around us, because the ordinary is where real life is happening. He wants to use his creation, and our daily rhythms in it to bring about spiritual formation.

"The kind of Spiritual life and disciplines needed to sustain the Christian life are quiet, repetitive and ordinary" - Tish Harrison Warren, Liturgy of the Ordinary

This morning I want to change the way you think about eating and drinking, as we consider the Meal.

1. A Meal

1. Obviously a meal (both eating and drinking) is something that is absolutely essential to life - something so common that we often don't even think about it having any deep meaning or significance. Maybe you grew up in a home where everyone would fend for themselves for meals, scattered throughout the house, differing and conflicting schedules, so that you rarely sat down for a meal together and communed or connected in any significant way. Maybe if you did have a family meal it still felt more like school lunch than a family tradition or a sacred moment. And for others of you the table was a place to connect and be family, to talk through deep and personal things.
2. In our culture today people seem to generally use food in two ways - either as a necessary evil - you have to eat to stay alive - food is fuel - so it doesn't really matter what you put in your body just scarf it down so you can get on to the important stuff. OR we have turned eating into an end in itself - a kind of decadent epicurean feast where it is all about tantalizing the senses - trying to quench an insatiable hunger and an insatiable thirst - My wife, Grace, made a comment about this the other day - we are constantly trying to find more flavor, new taste and new experience, it never ends...My wife often has to remind me - this doesn't have to be the most perfect meal. You will eat again.

1. The problem with both of these views is they miss the deep meaning and significance behind the sacredness of meal.
3. In the ancient near east, a meal was never just a meal - a time to simply ingest food and quench thirst, or just about debaucherous feasting - A meal was about kinship and friendship. It was about hospitality. It celebrated covenant and promise. It is significant in scripture that the first meal ever mentioned being prepared and eaten is a meal between Abraham and YHWH (Genesis 18:3-8)
 1. *In the Near East culture, “Meals themselves - the food served, the manner in which it was done and by whom - carried socially significant, coded communication. The more formal the meal, the more loaded with messages. The messages had to do with honor, social rank in the family and community, belonging, purity and holiness. Among God’s chosen people Israel - Meals became ways of experiencing and enjoying God’s presence and provision.” - The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*

2. The Meal

1. In the Bible, people ate meals just like we do, but even at the meals God's presence was expected, awaited, and enjoyed. All meals were sacred because YHWH had provided them. Meals were also used as memorials. There were social meals like weddings, and harvest parties and then there were the national meals and festivals that were given to Israel as a way to commemorate their national identity and story - Of course this is the way we see it introduced into the nation of Israel - into their cultural Identity. It is significant that before God gives the nation of Israel any laws, commands, etc, He gives them a yearly meal, an act, to remember his presence, provision, and salvation - The Passover meal...
2. God gives Israel one of the most common, earthy, human ways to remember their story - a meal.
3. In Exodus 13:8 God tells Moses that this meal is about remembering - in the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where people recalibrate their lives according to what's being remembered.
4. God says, When you sit down to eat this meal, and your children ask - What does this mean? Tell them - "**it is because of what the Lord did for me**". This meal is to be a liturgical act of telling themselves, and their family, the story of God and finding their own

story, and identity in it. - “what he did for me”. I love that, God makes it so personal.

1. It reminds me of Psalm 107:2-3, **“Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story - those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.”**
5. This Passover meal in particular becomes an incredible memorial to train Israel not to forget where they came from, their salvation from slavery, who their God is, and who they are in light of his rescue, and their new freedom under him... - It becomes the story that they tell.

3. The Eschatological Meal - The Kingdom Meal

1. There developed around the time of the prophets a vision for a final meal - a Meal in the Kingdom of Heaven. - not just a spiritual meal, or some esoteric experience - The understanding was that just like the passover celebrated the Exodus - there would be a meal in the new age - with all nations joining in to commemorate the final Exodus - The final victory of God, his judgment of the nations and the restoration of all things.
 1. **“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.” - Isaiah 25:6-7**
 2. And as time went on the idea of being an honored guest at this meal began to develop. Remember I said, a meal wasn’t just food to be eaten but intimacy to be shared, a sign of honor and deep friendship. - Oh to be a friend of YHWH and to sit at his table. We get pictures of this honor and intimacy behind a meal in the Bible - David, bringing Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth to his own table to eat all the days of his life. An act of honoring someone and sharing deep intimacy and friendship together.
 3. This Kingdom Feast is mentioned in the Gospels. Jesus challenges the common understanding of the day that it is the Jews who are deep intimate friends of YHWH and will be at this Kingdom meal

1. (Luke 14:15-23 READ ALOUD)

1. So who gets to be at this meal, Who gets to sit at God's table - who gets the deep intimacy, friendship and hospitality of God?

4. The Last Meal

1. Now once again, Jesus comes on the scene and radically reinterprets the meaning of the meal and shows what it is, and what it always pointed to.
2. Many of us are familiar with the Eucharist, or Communion - the bread and the cup - that Jesus instituted at The Last Meal as a Christian sacrament. Jesus, while he and his disciples are celebrating the Passover together, takes the unleavened bread and breaks it telling his disciples to eat it - because this is a symbol of his body that will be broken for them. Likewise Jesus takes a cup of wine and passes it around the table telling each of them to drink of it - it is a symbol of his blood that will be poured out for the sins of many - this is the ratification of the New Covenant. And he says, DO THIS in remembrance of me...
3. I love how in the gospel of Luke it records that Jesus said, with fervent desire have I desired to eat THIS meal with you before I suffer. And then Jesus goes on to explain the significance of THIS last meal - Particularly the bread and the cup. They symbolize him and his life giving sacrifice for the world. It is THIS Meal - the bread and the cup and what they signify that will bring an unprecedented intimacy and friendship with God. Jesus fervently desires to be with his people - to abide with them, in close friendship and intimacy.
 1. *"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." - Frederick Bruner, The Gospel of John*
 1. And this is what Communion or Eucharist is really about: it is the word becoming flesh again and again. It is the most earthy way that the heavenly Lord wants to be with us. It is about communing with our Lord
 2. Jesus talks extensively of this in John 6:53-56 - **Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever**

eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

3. This Eucharistic Meal is Jesus' offer of permanent, ongoing, friendship. He invites us to dine often at his table, and to eat this meal with him. An act of permanent ongoing association and identity with him - making our home with him and he with us.
4. Through this meal and what it symbolizes - the tearing of Jesus flesh (the breaking of the bread); the shedding of his blood (symbolized in the cup), the judgment of God will fall on Jesus himself - the lamb of God, and the judgment will Passover his people and the way to God's presence will cleared. As we said last week, Jesus sacrifice is what makes way for the Spirit to come upon humanity. The Spirit will be given - he will abide with us and us with him...And in an unprecedented way we will experience the presence and provision of God - his hospitality. It's what the prophet Jeremiah foretold - "**The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,"** declares the Lord. "**This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,"** declares the Lord.**"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord, because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,** declares the Lord. **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** -Jeremiah 31:31-34
5. This meal therefore is not to be taken hastily, it is not to be taken casually, it is not to be scarfed down, but to be savored, it's to be taken in a worthy manner, as Paul says, as we reflect on God's invitation of intimate friendship and hospitality that he offers us through this meal - through the life, death and resurrection of his Son.
 1. "**Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.**" Jesus tells us that this is the way to settle into

our home with him; by regularly dining at his table. Our weekly gatherings around God's word and the table of the Lord should be like weekly homecomings.

1. The Lord's table, this meal, is a weekly offer to reorient our lives around the person and mission of Jesus to live in him and him in us. To enjoy deep friendship and intimacy with God. We join him in that by trusting in his death for us - that it paid for our sin, cleansed us from unrighteousness, and also by continuing his mission- displaying the kingdom life through our lives, until he comes again.
2. The Meal 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 and his mission our sole identity.
 1. *"The Lord's Supper is a repeated Altar Call to ongoing conversion, to fresh recommitments and entrustments of oneself to the Lord Jesus Christ, The Bread of Life." - Bruner, The Gospel of John*

5. Eat and Savor this Meal

1. Use this meal as a Liturgy.
2. *"The kind of Spiritual life and disciplines needed to sustain the Christian life are quiet, repetitive and ordinary" - Tish Harrison Warren, Liturgy of the Ordinary*
3. Church, what if we slowed down and began to use these physical acts, and rhythms of our lives, as ways to connect and reconnect to God. What if you used a meal each day as an opportunity to recalibrate your body, soul and spirit to the Lord. Like the Israelites - Use it to tell one another your passover story. Tell what the Lord did for you. What an incredible memorial to train us not to forget the goodness and kindness of the Lord in saving us. To remember we also were slaves to sin, but now we are freed to God.
 1. What if we began to use The MEAL as a reminder, not only of our sin being atoned for, but of God's desire to be our intimate friend, and for us to make our home in him, to settle into him, to find all our delight, our hope, our comfort, and peace, our desires in him.
4. Use this meal to bring you home to commune with the Father, to delight in the Son, and walk in the Spirit...