

Supper With The Master

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Introduction:

Two friends stood in a large railway station and watched an express train with the most modern of engines go flying through. 'What a powerful engine!' remarked one of them to his friend, who was the Station-master of that station. 'Yes!' said the Station-master who was a Christian, 'On the rails. But off the rails it is the weakest thing in the world. And,' he added, 'how like the Christian! His power lies in communion with his Lord and Savior, but when he leaves the path of communion he is the weakest person in the world.'

The importance of meal time in our culture is one that has devolved over time. I remember as a boy that supper time was an important time. Mom and dad just home from a long day at work would gather around the table, give thanks for the provision, and embark upon a solemn period of sharing. Sometimes the conversations could be quite in depth, other times there may be no conversations at all. But the time was spent together, in sharing together what the Lord had provided for our sustenance. Over time, because of the business of life, supper time has taken a back seat in a lot of ways. When our children were small we would do our best to have a family meal time together. I would purposefully call on one of my sons to lead our family in giving thanks. Then share in the abundance of God's grace together. Again, the conversations were filled with the days events and it gave us the opportunity to see into one another lives. It was a means by which we could still be together, be a part of one another lives, when we were apart due to work, school, etc. As our children have grown and life has become busy, supper time has begun to wane. One son moving out, another beginning his senior year of high school and a daughter coming into her teens has us all pulled in different directions. Yet, supper time is still a time of solitude. We have had a rule at our table for some years, at least since cell phones have become so

readily popular, that no phones are allowed at the table. The kids get irritated at that rule but so be it. This is our time. It is a time which is to be un-interrupted by the world outside. A time when our devotion is to one another, and not everything else that is pulling at us. In time I pray they grow to appreciate that rule, because good family time is hard to come by these days.

When considering the Lord's supper, this past week I was faced with a study that revealed information to me that I had not quite grasped before. No, its not some new revelation or the like. It is a concept that I have had others, my wife included, mention in the past but never really clicked with me until in the throws of study my mind was overcome by the information and parallels that were lain out in front of me. From the deep meanings and emotions tied up in the supper time in the customs of the ancients to the brutal betrayal that our Master faced. I have preached on the Lord's Supper several times over the last few years and used a couple of different approaches. This approach is some different for me and I hope that maybe it will be beneficial for you. With the thoughts of the solemn attitude that we know to be involved in supper time, let us approach this study as a "Supper With The Master."

As we bring this introduction to a close we need to consider a few thoughts regarding the customs of the ancient times. Supper time for the Hebrews then and many of the folk of the area now was and is very highly regarded. From the seating positions to the food itself everything had a purpose of peace and good tidings toward one another. It has been said that even the enemy, when he entered the tent of the host, was treated and regarded as a dear friend. This kinship was expected to be extended to the point of death in protection of the one who has entered his abode. A typical meal of the time consisted of a common bread of the area, and usually a vegetable soup type dish. Meat was not partaken as often as one might think as it was reserved for special occasions and the entertaining of special or even surprise guests. Upon entering the home the visitor was expected to remove his shoes from his feet as not to soil the

blanket carpeting or furniture of the home. Before the meal he would have his hands and feet washed and again a washing would take place after the meal was done. The supper time was such an important venue in the Hebrew mind that even if a visitor arrived, no matter the importance, the host nor any of the others present would arise, nor were they expected, to greet the visitor. Supper time carried a weight of great importance. The host would wait upon the visitor, even the enemy, as though he were the most important person in existence attending to his every need. This breaking bread together was often used in the making and sealing of covenants as well as in mending broken covenants. The customs of the time and area are far different than what we would practice in our land in the West. From the greetings at the door to the farewell these things would seem obscure to us, but carried a great weight of importance to them. A number of the customs and mannerisms will be discussed as we continue.

In this Supper with the Master many of the customs will be observed in parallel. The line of the betrayer is seen woven throughout the final week of the Master's life. So many of the customs are different from what we understand from the invitation to the dinner, to the food, to the seat, to the sop. This study will investigate the four Gospels and, as best as I could, place them in a chronological order for a clear picture. Some things I realize because of the authors manner of writing will be a little out of order but I've done the best I could. Things which we take for granted in their wording will be expressed in the Preparation, Invitation, and Invocation of the Lord's Supper.

Preparation

We begin 6 days before the Passover roughly 2 miles from Jerusalem in the town of Bethany (John 12:1). Lazarus and his two sisters resided here and we are brought in our minds eye to the house of Simon the leper. Tradition declares that this Simon was likely the father of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. He would not have been a man currently suffering from leprosy, as they were in the home with him, but as one who

had been stricken with the illness some time past retained the designation. Many variables are in consideration as to why but either way the evidence we have shows this to be the case. The feast of Passover was near and chief priests were busily scheming with trickery (Mark 14:1-2) how they might remove this man Jesus from their sight (Luke 22:1-2). The chief priests were a horrible lot. The attention being removed from them as the Jewish leaders and their “perceived” political prowess being threatened they wanted to rid the world of this “blasphemer” as they called Him. They knew that many of the Jews believed in Him and that, John 12:9–11- “...a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.”

While in the home of Simon the leper a supper was prepared for Jesus. Martha took her role as the hostess and served Him. According to custom we can rest assured that every need He, and those who sat at the table with Him, was managed faithfully (John 12:2). Whether they were reclined or sitting upright is a mystery but it would seem the following events may declare. Customarily when the supper was served and the guests would sit at that table things were quite different than what we would suppose sitting at the table meant. What we see as a table was usually the ground. If there were a table being used it would have at been ground level with one of two sitting positions that the diners would use. One would be sitting upright cross legged in what we call “Indian Style.” The other was reclined with the head facing the table and the feet away from the table, leaning upon one arm, typically the left arm. This would allow for guests to lean back into one another for a more private conversation if the need arose. While reclined at the table a woman entered the room carrying an alabaster box filled with a very expensive oil of spikenard (Mark 14:3). John’s Gospel declares this to be Mary (John 11:1, 12:3). Some would argue that the anointing in John 12 compared with the other Gospels is two different occurrences but it would seem more

likely that the 4 accounts detail a more clear picture of 1 occurrence. You decide for yourself which is the case. Either way, this oil of spikenard was put upon the head of the Christ. Mary then placed the oil upon His feet wiping His feet with her hair in essence anointing Him from head to toe. The aroma of the oil filled the house (John 12:3). As one who is a regular user of quality essential oils I can understand the pungency of the oil used. I attempted to look up what spikenard oil was or what it contained and if what is understood today to be the same as this, valerian has a very pungent aroma and can easily fill a large room with its essence. This was not something done out of haste or last minute. Mary knew what she was doing. She planned it. She brought it in at the right time. She washed His head and His feet with the oil preparation.

This act caused quite a stir. Matthew (26:8-9) and Mark (14:4-5) both declare that the disciples became indignant at this behavior. They called it a “waste.” Some even put a price upon what was “wasted” in their eyes and began criticizing her. John (12:4-6), however, points out that it was Judas who was the problem. Did he by his actions and words incite a riot among the disciples? Did he begin the hyena principle of a singular attack that brought about the attack of the others present? Through inspiration the Holy Spirit had John to record that Judas was interested none whatsoever in the condition of the poor. His focus was on the purse. He was the one who carried it and often took what was put into it.

At this point I can only imagine Emmanuel’s righteous indignation. The Master said “Let Her Alone” (Mark 14:6, John 12:7-8), “why do you trouble her, she has done a good work for me” (Mark 14:6, Matt 26:10). A good work? One can only imagine the disciples bewilderment at this objection. Matthew records (26:12–13) “For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” The Master was not discounting nor disregarding

the poor. Mark clarified His reaction (14:7-8) “For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could.” She has done what she could, everything she could, all that she could. What better thing could be said regarding any one of us than doing all for the cause of Christ that we can muster.

It is at this point that the betrayer began his work. It is at this point that I found myself in study completely shocked. The question has always been asked “why did Judas betray Jesus?” The simple answer has always been given because he was greedy. Because he kept the purse. And this is true, but examine this a little closer. Judas beginning this dissension of the disciples was corrected in front of them as according to John, Judas appears to have led this little insurrection against the use of the oil. The Spirit through John’s pen details that it was because he wanted the money. He kept the purse. It is here, at this point, that Luke declares (22:3–6) “Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.” He betrayed the Master, my Savior, over a few coins. He could not have the coins to put into the bag so he could feel good about himself with some self elated importance. 30 pieces of silver (Mark 14:10-11, Matt 26:14-16). How many men have been driven to the same position of betrayal of a dear friend, over money. I remember when I was young two brothers getting into a squabble over their deceased fathers pasture land. One taking the life of the other, over what....? How many have sacrificed their families, their goods, their righteousness, their security chasing that all mighty dollar. He betrayed the Messiah over something as insignificant, worthless, and temporary as a few coins. He could not get the coins in the bag for the oil, so he turned to the chief priests. He was going to get those coins one way or the other. To the point of the betraying,

stabbing in the back, his dear friend. This would not be the end of the story for Judas, that we will examine shortly.

The days of preparing the Lord's Supper are coming to an end. The Day of Unleavened Bread had come and the Passover was to be killed (Luke 22:7, Mark 14:12). At this juncture John's Gospel leaves off for a bit until a question would later be asked. But for now the disciples inquire about the place where He desired to eat the Passover (Mark 14:12, Luke 22:8-13). Peter and John are sent into the city to find a man carrying a pitcher of water (Luke 22:8-9, Mark 14:13-16) that would show them a large upper room. According to the customs of the time special banquet meals were partaken of at night in an upper room. These rooms would be well lit in stark contrast to the outside darkness as these meals were partaken of late in the evening. Exclusions from these feasts were considered to be terrible and the excluded were said to be "cast out into outer darkness" (cf. Matt 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). The Easterner would face an emotional dread at the thought of being or sleeping in the dark as a candle was always left burning to avoid this experience. Is it any wonder that the Master would use this terminology of "outer darkness" to express the eternal punishment awaiting the disobedient?

Invitation

In the East and during this particular time of history there is a custom that we would regard as odd in comparison to our culture. Fred H. Wight in "Manners and Customs of the Bible Lands" states:

"In some parts of the East a custom of double invitations to an entertainment has been observed. Some time before the feast is to be served, an invitation is sent forth; and then, when the appointed time draws near, a servant is sent again, this time to announce that everything is ready."

He would go on to describe several occurrences in Scripture where this took place (Est 5:8, 6:14, Matt 22:2-3). Luke 14:16–17- “Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, “Come, for all things are now ready.””

“The following words of Christ’s parable need to be understood from the Oriental point of view: And the lord said unto the servant, Go out in to the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled (Luke 14:23). The usual brief invitation in America and the ready acceptance of it would be considered in the East entirely undignified. In the East the one invited must not at first accept, but is expected rather to reject the invitation. He must be *urged* to accept. Although all the time he expects to accept he must allow the one inviting him the privilege of compelling him to accept.

One may be asking at this point “but where is the invitation then? Let us observe. At one point during the instituting of the memorial of His death the Master uttered “I will no longer eat of it until its is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16), He would “no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25), “with you in my Fathers kingdom” (Matt 26:29). The invitation then is before us. He desires to dine with you and I (Rev 3:20). As He knocks upon the door He is compelling you to dine with Him, but there is only one place where the “Supper With The Master” can be procured. In the Kingdom. The invitation is this, John 3:3–5- “Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Matt 11:28–30- “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.””Rev 22:17- “And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”As was the custom when the hour had come He came with the 12, the apostles, and sat down with them (Luke 22:14, Matt 26:20, Mark 14:17)The betrayer was already at work. His greed, anger, embarrassment, and immaturity guiding his steps. The green eyed jealousy that sent this man into a temper driven rage was at work. And Jesus knew it....

Invocation

The supper prepared, 13 men sat at the table with the dish in the middle. This was and is in many places of the East the typical means of meal time. Utensils were not used so along with the fingers for meats they would use a type of “flat bread” torn and shaped into something that would resemble a spoon and dip into the dish together. Therefore washing before the meal was a necessity in which the host or his servant would pour water over the hands of the guests and allow the dirty water to drain through a bowl with holes in order to take the dirty water out of sight. Often the host would have a place at the table reserved for the most special of guests and would provide for this guest the most succulent piece in the dish by placing it, with his own fingers, into the mouth of said guest. This is what is commonly known as the “sop.” It is here that more of Judas’ subversion is evident.

Three of the Gospel recorders detail the Masters words. One of you, at the table with me, will betray me. They all began to be sorrowful and ask Him and one another as to the identity of this one (Matt 26:21-22, Mark 14:18-19, Luke 22:21-23, John 13:21-30). One can only imagine the reeling minds of the disciples, or, 11 of them at least. One knew, without a doubt he knew, and he was not the only one that knew. With this

declaration was the point at which he could have stopped. He could have turned his desires around. He could have repented of his plans. The Master even told him, as he told them all, “woe to this one, it would have been better if he had not been born” (Matt 26:24). He went as far as to dip his hand into the dish with the one whom he was going to betray even accepting the “sop” at the hand of the Christ (John 13:21-30). He took this solemn time of peace toward one another, this moment of close friendship, and committed an act of treason against the Master greater still than toward any enemy, no matter the level, should be regarded. Then he asked the question himself, “Rabbi, is it I?” and he said to him “You have said it” (Matt 26:25).

Among Eastern nations it is considered a terrible sin indeed for anybody who has accepted hospitality from a host to turn against him in the doing of an evil deed. This feeling goes back to the very ancient times and is often alluded to by various writers... (Wight)Obad 1:7- “All the men in your confederacy Shall force you to the border; The men at peace with you Shall deceive you and prevail against you. Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No one is aware of it.”Psa 41:9- “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.”

As the disciples reclined, John leaned back into the breast of the Master and asked Him again about the identity of the betrayer. John 13:18- ““I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’” John 13:25–26- “Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”

All of the warnings. All of the encouragements. All of the endearments. All of the opportunities, wasted. What began with what Judas saw as “wastefulness” would in

turn be his own waste. Here was his chance to turn around and do the right thing, and he wasted it.

As they were eating He took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. He declared, “Take eat, this is My body, which is given for you.” Then He took the cup after supper, gave thanks, declaring the memorial of the fruit of the vine to be taken remembering His blood of the new covenant shed for many for the remission of sins (Mark 14:22-25, Matt 26:26-29, Luke 22:19-20). “Do this,” He said, “in remembrance of me.”

The “Supper With The Master” is awaiting your attendance. The invitation has been sent and now you are being compelled to attend. Upon your arrival you must wash yourself Eph 5:26–27- “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” It is in this very act that one comes in contact with the blood of Christ Rom 6:3–6- “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” that we could be saved through His work Col 2:12- “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Jesus said that is how you enter the kingdom. It is in the kingdom, the church (Matt 16:13-19) that one can have “Supper With The Master”

Conclusion:

It may be that you feel as though you are un-savable. You are not alone. This is a common thought among many. We get this idea stuck in our head that we have to be the picture of perfection and due to our own self-image, a product of the devil btw, we think we have no no course of safety. This thought is as untrue as any that can be obtained. Paul, the self proclaimed chief among sinners, was able to find grace. If he can, so can you. How much more value does God put on you than on the animals, and birds of the air? He clothes them, He feeds them. You are created in His image, He Loves You. He desires that all should come to repentance (2Pet 3:9). You are part of that all.

Consider this: Among oriental people, when a covenant of friendship has been once broken, it may be renewed by the involved once again eating together. After His resurrection, Jesus ate at least three times with various disciples of His, and this was no doubt in order to renew the covenant, which had been broken by their disloyalty to Him during the days of His passion (Luke 24:30, 41-43, John 21:12-13). In the Old Testament we have an example of this when Jacob and Laban were in strained relationship. They restored their friendship by eating together, as well as entering into an oath (Gen 31:53-54). What if Judas had not taken his own life, What if he had been on that beach with the Master partaking of the meal with Him? What if He had taken the opportunity to renew his covenant of friendship with the Master. Judas wasted his, will you waste yours?

Information about Bible lands customs for this work were taken from “Manners and Customs of Bible Lands” by Fred Wight

Illustrations taken from www.sermonillustrations.com