

# The Passover

Preaching series: The Lord's Supper

Text: Deuteronomy 16:1-8

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Context: Papanui Baptist Church

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## The Salvation We Live

Everyone has a belief about how salvation works, both in and out of the church. We may not put it into words, but everyone lives with a working theory of salvation . . . How do you define "happiness"? What is "success"? What way of living is "good", and what's "bad"? What do we call "sickness" and what do we call "healing"?

These questions sound abstract, but they're answered by the way we live. What's your theory of salvation and your view of the good life? Your everyday actions display your answer. The congratulations we offer first home buyers and the interest we take in home improvements says that salvation is about getting ahead. The attention we pay to physical health issues and our relative silence about other things says that salvation is about not having to suffer. And the people we spend our time with, and the places in which we dwell, are the measure for our picture of the "good life." Our beliefs about salvation are there for all to see, revealed in the functional ways we live our life.

## Introducing Lord's Supper Series

That's true not only of individuals, but also of us as a church. Our beliefs about salvation are on display when we gather in the patterns of our actions. And one of those actions is this strange meal that we take every couple of weeks after the sermon . . . We eat the rice cracker or cube of white bread and drink a sip of red cordial, believing that this lies at the very heart of the story of salvation. At its worst, it feels tacked on to the service—a strange old tradition we've just always done; other times, it feels sacred and meaningful, as if the veil of heaven is pulled back for a moment, and we get a glimpse of glory, of "something more". What is this thing that some call "Communion", others "the Lord's Supper", and still others the "Eucharist"? What's meant by the words, "This is my body, broken for you; this is my blood, poured out for you"?

You're probably aware of debates in the church about this meal: some say the bread and juice literally become Christ's flesh and blood; others claim it's just symbolic. Some people want the Table open to everyone; others think it's for those who are baptised. And what about children—are they invited to the Table? What's the best way to serve the Supper: dipping the bread in the juice? Breaking a big loaf of bread and having cups of wine? Churches have split over Table manners. There's lots we could say about this meal.

In our lead-up to Easter, I want to better understand the Lord's Supper by exploring the Scriptures together. My hope is that we'll end up with a richer, more textured experience of the Supper, enabling us to more tangibly experience the gospel of Jesus together. I'd even like for us to consider making this a weekly rhythm, a practice at the very heart of our gathering together on Sundays! I think we should think carefully about the Lord's Supper, because our beliefs about salvation are on display in the patterns of our actions.

## Old Testament Roots of the Supper

The Lord's Supper only emerged in the New Testament with Jesus and his disciples, but its roots are deep in the Old Testament, in the story of Israel. In fact, I think the Lord's Supper is a uniting theme

for the Bible: it's a way of holding together this story of God's saving relationship with the world! The most obvious echo of the Supper in the Old Testament is the Passover . . .

## Original Passover

- Reading from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, "God to the Rescue!" (i.e., story of the Exodus)

## Tempted Back to Egypt

So in the exodus, God delivered Israel from the tyranny of Pharaoh: he brought them out of Egypt so that they could worship him in freedom in their own land. And they lived happily ever after . . . Well, the crazy thing is, no sooner had God liberated them than the Israelites were tempted back to Egypt . . . While Moses was on the mountain talking with God, the people were already making themselves a golden calf to worship. And time and again in the Promised Land the Israelites were tempted back to Egypt, back to the ways of slavery under other gods and other rulers. The same thing happens for many people in the church today. Jesus has freed us from the hand cuffs of sin, yet we put them back on all the time—we're tempted back to Egypt.

Take David Brooks' example of an upwardly mobile Christian business woman. Erica, a company CEO, had dinner with a celebrated business leader—someone she'd admired for years. After a "business lunch" in her hotel suite, Erica and the business celebrity committed adultery together. About an hour later, Erica was overwhelmed with pain, shame, and regret. And she was shocked: her marriage was healthy; she wasn't lonely. She felt betrayed by herself, like she'd become someone else when with the businessman. But our beliefs about salvation are there for all to see, revealed in the functional ways we live our life. Her slide into slavery wasn't sudden and spontaneous; no, this story took place in the context of a long line of decisions that have left her affections and desires distorted with a false view of "the good life". Through thousands of small actions; through the slow movement of her affections and desires, this was really who Erica had become.

Her definition of "success" and "the good life" had changed. So, Erica started to act in a drama that made committing adultery with a business celebrity the obvious action to take: it made sense for the story of success she had come to believe. Like the Israelites, the followers of Jesus are constantly tempted back to Egypt through the alternative stories of salvation we see and the shifting of our desires for their image of success. Thanks be to God, his act for salvation wasn't a one-off: God acts to release us from our chains again and again and again.

## Come Out of Egypt!

Consider the Israelites . . . Not long after they'd committed adultery with another god by making the golden calf, God gave them a special practice to help them come back out of Egypt. He told them to celebrate the Passover in the first month of every year. It involved pilgrimage, community, blood and diet . . . It involved an all-night celebration feast, a week of unleavened bread, then the final day of rest. God gave them a tangible, embodied practice of remembrance.

The Passover was about remembering the Exodus—not like "remember your wife's birthday"—but remembering as identity formation: remembering into God's story of salvation, remembering that we've been delivered from slavery; a lived, performed re-enactment of the exodus story: "Come out of Egypt!" In the celebration of the Passover, the Spirit caused the past events of the exodus to be their present and lived reality. "Oh yeah! This is who God is. This is who we are." The Spirit inserted them into that history of God's salvation.

Notice how in the book of Joshua, more than a generation after the original Passover and exodus took place, God speaks as if this new generation of Jews were actually there: “You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians” (Josh. 24:7). What your ancestors saw is what you saw. Telling the story brings it alive. Each person comes to see his or herself as if they personally came out of Egypt. God gave them a tangible and multi-sensory practice to form their desires and loves so they could live in the true story of salvation; so they too could be saved out of Egypt.

## Christian Formation for Everyday Life

The Israelites had these practices of worship and identity formation. In the same way, I deeply believe in the formational power of the Sunday Gathering. God works on us in here so that we can faithfully and creatively respond to the situations we find ourselves in out there. Sunday trains us for Monday.

- E.g. God forms us to be generous through taking up the offering
- E.g. God forms us as people who live for the King by getting us to sing
- E.g. God trains us to be hospitable to workmates by making us connecting us as a body with people who are different to us

## The New Exodus

And at the Table of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus bids us come and eat his flesh and blood, not that we might come out of Egypt, but out of the very abyss of sin itself. At the Table Jesus restores us to our true inheritance as true sons and daughters, adopted by the Spirit into the Son’s freedom with his Father. It involves the breaking of bread, the pouring of juice, symbols of Christ’s body, broken for us, and Christ’s blood, poured out for us: “This do in remembrance of me.” The connections between the Lord’s Supper and the Jewish Passover can illuminate the type of remembrance intended at the Supper. In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the Spirit causes the past events of the cross to be our present and lived reality. “This is who God is. This is who we are.” The Spirit inserts us into that history of God’s salvation, gets us seeing the world right side up. It’s as if the veil of heaven gets pulled back for a moment, and we get a glimpse the world as it really is, and one day will be: reflecting the glory of Jesus.

## The Salvation We Live

And what about Erica and her fall into sin? Having been brought sharply to her senses, she knew she had to turn from this false story of success and rediscover her true story, the one told in her Christian faith. So, she comes to her pastor and shares her story, hoping for redemption. And does her pastor respond? Offer a onetime prayer for her to change her life? Tell her, “Jesus forgives you; try better next time”? No. Learning from the Passover and the Lord’s Supper, the pastor points her toward a new way of life—brought into a community of Word and sacrament, with its shared habits of prayer, worship, Bible study, service, and witness. Yet it’s not just a human practice that will lead to change. It is the Holy Spirit’s work in uniting her to Christ and his people, bringing her slowly yet surely to recognize and participate in the drama of being a child of God. In all these practices, the Spirit can reshape her loves, her affections, and her actions.

Just as in the celebration of the Passover the Spirit causes the past events of the exodus to be the Israelites’ present and lived reality, so in the celebration of Lord’s Supper the Spirit causes the past event of Jesus’ death and resurrection—to be our present and lived reality. Our beliefs about salvation are there for all to see, revealed in the breaking of bread and the pouring of juice. May the Spirit lead us into a richer, more textured experience of the Supper together, enabling us to more tangibly experience the gospel of Jesus together.