

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
September 2, 2018

## **Do This in Remembrance of Me**

Luke 22:14-20

"This do in remembrance of me." The fact that those words are etched into our communion table gives them a certain permanence and durability. These aren't just words typed into a PowerPoint slide or photocopied onto a Sunday bulletin. They're carved into wood, on the front of a big, solid table that takes more than one person to move. So there's a weightiness and constancy about these words. Jesus' statement isn't just a passing thought or a momentary insight. It's a command that's meant to last.

"Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus' words have become part of the furniture of our faith, literally and figuratively. In addition to having them on our table, we have them in our heads, on our tongues, in our songs, and in our sermons. These words about remembrance are themselves easy to remember. And that's both good and bad. Good, in that we can quickly call them to mind and use them to inspire us and guide us. Bad, in that we get so accustomed to them that we take them for granted and don't reflect more deeply on why Jesus said them and what they mean for us.

So today, as we gather at the Lord's Table, let's not just thoughtlessly gulp down his words but chew on them patiently and digest them gratefully. No matter how familiar this act of worship may be to you, there's fresh spiritual nourishment, and deeper communion with Christ, available to you as you take the time to ponder and respond to what he's saying.

In Luke's account of the Lord's Supper, the Passover meal becomes an occasion of farewell by Jesus to his followers. First comes the meal itself, then words of warning, instruction, and encouragement for the days that lie ahead. There's certainly a place for looking back on where Jesus and his disciples have been in the course of his ministry. Crowds hungry for the good news and responsive to his preaching and teaching. Bodies and lives restored by his miraculous healings. The poor and the marginalized welcomed to his table of fellowship. The message of the kingdom generating repentance and faith. But also moments of failure and misunderstanding among his disciples. Places where his message and ministry were rejected. Rising hostility and increasing opposition from many of the religious leaders. And Jesus' own repeated statements predicting his suffering and death.

Now it's sundown, and Jesus gathers in the upper room with his disciples. His focus is less on what's behind them and more on what's ahead of them. In fact, Jesus opens the meal scene with a declaration of hope. "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (vv. 15-16). Jesus was anticipating what God's people had always been anticipating, the great Messianic banquet, when God's people would be fully redeemed and God's reign fully accomplished. And the Passover meal, which commemorated and celebrated how God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, was a foretaste of this final feast. So when Jesus met at the table with his disciples, he was bringing together memory and hope.

This carries over into the way that he shares the cup with his disciples. One of the peculiarities of Luke's account of the Last Supper is the presence of two cups. One before the bread and one after the bread. This may have to do with prescriptions regarding the Passover meal that required four cups of wine, to be used at certain steps in the ceremony. My purpose isn't to get deeply into that interpretative challenge, but simply to highlight that when Jesus gives the first cup, he's still stressing their shared conviction about the arrival of God's reign. "I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (v. 18).

All that Jesus says and does during the Lord's Supper is said and done in light of the promise that God's sovereign purposes will come to completion. But this doesn't mean that the past is insignificant. On the contrary, Jesus and his disciples are being faithful managers of memory. They're doing what God's people had been doing for centuries. In its worship, its work, and its witness, Israel was constantly recalling and reciting the deeds of the Lord. Otherwise, they as God's people would fail to give glory to God. They would lose sight of who they were. They would forget who had rescued them from Egyptian bondage. They would forsake God's commandments and depart from God's ways. They would give their adoration and allegiance to idols that had no power to save. By not tending to their collective memory, God's people were exposing themselves to all sorts of spiritual risks and dangers.

Here in the context of the Passover meal, Jesus is showing the disciples how the reality of God's deliverance in the past is reaching its fulfillment in his own suffering and death. The exodus was more than just a chapter in the storybook of God's people. It was an ongoing, living reality that would soon take climactic shape in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. So Jesus gives his followers, then and now, a way of calling to mind the saving significance of his death. "And 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" (v. 19).

"Do this in remembrance of me." Words etched in wood and engraved on our minds. Words handed down across centuries of the church's life and worship. The word translated as "do" involves the repetition of a rite or the regular observance of a ceremony. The term rendered as "this" refers to the action of sharing the bread. The word translated as "in remembrance" has to do with being reminded. And the term rendered as "me" points to the person of Jesus and what he has done. Taken together, these words could also be translated as "Do this so that you will remember me."

Not in the sense of, "I'll soon be dead and gone, so here's what I want you to do to preserve the memory of my life and its significance." When a loved one dies, we have various ways of remembering them and calling to mind the shape and importance of their life. It might be the recollection of a particular moment or experience with them. It might be an object or item they passed on to us, or something they intentionally prepared to convey a message to those who are still alive. We witnessed a form of this earlier in the week when Senator John McCain, who had died of brain cancer, left behind a farewell letter. The closing words read: "Do not despair of our present difficulties but believe always in the promise and greatness of America, because nothing is inevitable here. Americans never quit. We never surrender. We never hide from history. We make history. Farewell, fellow Americans. God bless you, and God bless America."

Final words can be some of life's most meaningful and powerful words. They can summarize and perpetuate a person's identity and impact. Sometimes these words take the form of an epitaph. The Dutch mathematician who was the first to calculate pi had it engraved on his tombstone: 3.14159265358979323846264338327950. Martin Luther King

Jr. had "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty I am free at last." In one of his journals, Benjamin Franklin once wrote an epitaph for himself: "The Body of B. Franklin, Printer, like the Cover of an old Book, Its Contents torn out, And stript of its Lettering and Gilding, Lies here, Food for Worms. . . ." Thomas Jefferson's epitaph read: "Author of the Declaration of Independence [and] of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom & Father of the University of Virginia."<sup>1</sup>

"Do this in remembrance of me." Words engraved not on a tombstone but on a table. A table where we, as Paul says, "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Yes, we proclaim that he was raised from the dead, and that he's coming again to complete what God has started. Jesus isn't still buried under a grave marker inscribed with words capturing his legacy and transmitting it to future generations. No, he's alive and present. Present among his people. Present at this table. But not alive and present in a way that cancels out the reality of his death, and what it accomplished. Jesus' death is where the forgiveness of our sins was secured. His death is where we were brought out from captivity to sin and death. His death is where a new covenant, binding us to God and to one another, was established.

No wonder the Lord's Supper is how Jesus tells us to remember him. When we break the bread and share the cup, we once again call to mind the cross. There are many other things about our Lord, many other aspects of his ministry, many other events in his life, that we could call to mind. His birth. His preaching and teaching. His miracles. His table fellowship. His righteousness and mercy toward the poor and the marginalized. His challenge to the religious and political status quo. All these are important manifestations of the presence of God's kingdom. All these show us something about who Jesus is and why he has come.

But the one event that Jesus selected to be preserved and proclaimed in such a visible and tangible way was his death. As one commentator has pointed out, here in Luke's account of the Lord's Supper, we're in a boundary situation "where Jesus' own ministry is ending and the life of the church is already being called into being."<sup>2</sup> And here in this boundary zone where the leader is preparing his followers and pointing them toward the future, he gives them something. Not a book that compiles his teachings. Not a farewell letter to be read aloud. Not a scrapbook of photos from their ministry together. Not a plaque to commend them for loyal service. Not a map marking a sacred spot where they could go to honor him. Not instructions for a monument to be erected in his name. As important as his life was, and is, Jesus doesn't give us something that focuses us on his living. Instead, he gives us something that we can use to remember his dying. He gives us an act of eating and drinking. He gives us the bread and the cup. "Do this," he says, "in remembrance of me."

That way, when we start to live our lives by stories other than the story of God's love for us, this meal keeps alive the story of our Lord's suffering and crucifixion. When we stray from the Lord's will and start to make self the center of things, this meal recenters us on Christ and his cross. When we slip into complacency and slumber about matters of the kingdom, this meal reawakens us to the costliness of our salvation. When our spiritual memory dims, and we start to look toward and call upon other things for deliverance and hope, this meal pushes back against our forgetfulness with the repeated call to remember. Remember. Remember. "Do this in remembrance of me."

<sup>1</sup> Mark Batterson and Richard Foth, *A Trip around the Sun: Turning Your Everyday Life into the Adventure of a Lifetime* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) 188-89.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 261.