

Reformed Worship: The Anatomy of a Worship Service

Lesson 12: God Feasts With Us

Intro

Last time we talked about meeting with God in worship. But if all we have to bring before Him is our sin and guilt then meeting with God would be *terrifying*, Heb 12.28-29.

But the good news of the gospel is that in *Christian* worship (offered through and on the basis of the work of Christ as Mediator accepted by faith) we can *draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith* (Heb 10.22) because God doesn't meet us with our guilt; He meets us with His grace.

In sum: the worship service is a sacred moment when God condescends to His sinful people and *restores* them to Himself. Even though we don't deserve His favor—and have done plenty to warrant His wrath—God reminds us in worship that our relationship with Him is about *His* covenant commitment to us, not *our* performance before Him. For Christ's sake, in worship God renews His covenant faithfulness to us. He reminds us of the gospel. He calls us once again away from our works to His work, calling us to rest in His coming down and to stop trying to work our way up.

Intro

- I. Since the beginning of time, worship has followed a pattern that culminates in a feast. *In the sinless beginning* the apex of worship was to eat from the Tree of Life in fellowship with God, Gen 2. *In the sinless consummation*, the crowning joy will be the marriage supper of the Lamb, Rev 19. *And in the sin-laden interim*, the covenant of grace is built on the foundation of the atoning death of Christ, which is signified and sealed to the church in a meal instituted by Christ as a means of grace to be perpetually observed in worship until He comes again, 1Cor 11
- II. The Triune God is essentially and necessarily a God of communion. And by uniting us to His Son, He's brought us into that fellowship so that we can commune with Him both as our Father, our Groom, and our Life.
- III. In the Lord's Supper Christ is both the host and the meal itself. Just as He offered up Himself on the cross for us (Gal 2.20), so in the meal which signifies and seals that work, He offers Himself to us as our atoning Lamb.
- IV. While it's easy to think of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper as things we are doing for God (a public testimony, a dedication and rededication of ourselves to God, etc.), they are first and foremost about what God has done and is doing for us. God engages with us in the sacraments. He sets Christ forth to our faith by *signifying* Christ's mediation for us and by *sealing* the promise of Christ's work to us. We are recipients in the sacraments. God is the doer and we are the done-by. Of course the sacraments engage and obligate us, but only as far as it's a *response* to what God has done and is doing for us.
- V. *In the Lord's Supper God's Spirit strengthens our faith, hope, and love in the finished work of Christ as, by faith, we really and truly feast on Him.* WLC 161-162, 168
 - A. **A Feast of Faith**—The Lord's Supper calls us to *look back in faith* on what Christ has done for us.
 1. In every administration of the covenant of God's grace, He gave His people a visible and perpetual reminder of His goodness, a sign to signify His grace to them. Through Noah, He gave a rainbow, Gen 9.13-16. Through Abraham He gave circumcision, Gen 17.3-10. Through Moses He gave the passover (Ex 12.1-27) and the Sabbath, Ex 31.13-16. Through David He gave a kingdom, 2Sam 7.4-16. And all these found their consummation in the signs which the Lord gave to signify His finished work: baptism and the Supper.

2. The Supper is by nature a *memorial* meal in that it *reminds* us of Christ's atoning death and of the great deliverance and salvation He accomplished by it. Hence, we're to receive the Supper *in remembrance of Him*, 1Cor 11.24-25.
 - a) The sacramental signs are like signposts. They point away from themselves to that which they signify. The sign of the Supper points our faith away from itself to the person (Christ) and work (His atonement) it signifies.
 3. The Supper hereby strengthens our weak faith by using our senses to assure us that the person and work of Christ are ours. The bread and wine are no less real to our senses and received by our body than Christ is real to our faith and received by our spirit. To receive the Supper by faith is to believe that Christ Himself and His nourishing life are no less given to our soul than the bread and wine and their nourishment are given to our body, Gal 3.1; Acts 2.38; 1Cor 10.16
- B. Filled with Hope**—The Supper is also about looking forward in hope for what Christ will one day do.
1. Communing with God is not just the climax of the worship service, but it's the climax of a life of worship, Mt 26.29; Rev 19. Jesus raised our expectations and hope in a meal of fellowship that awaits us in heaven, a meal that we will eat with Him as He serves us. When He comes again to take us home, He's coming to bring us to His wedding feast, the supper provided by the Father in celebration of His marriage to us, Rev 19.9
 2. In the OT this reality was signified by the fact that every sin offering for atonement was to be followed by a peace offering for fellowship, Lev 7.1-15; cf. Ex 24.1-11. In the NT Christ has offered the atoning sacrifice once and for all. It can bear no repeating, Heb 9.11-12, 26; 10.11-27. Hence, with a perpetually effective atonement in place, we enjoy a perpetual meal of fellowship to assure us of the effectiveness of that atonement, 1Cor 11.26
 3. We participate in the Supper with joy and gladness because it nurtures our hope in the consummate supper for which we are being prepared, Isa 25.6-9
- C. Joined in Love**—Joined to Christ and to one another.
1. First and foremost we are united in the Supper to Christ Himself, 1Cor 10.16-17. When we partake of this meal we partake of Christ. We commune with Him and are given a share and participation in who He is and in what He has done, Rom 6.1-11
 - a) Thus the Supper is a visual aid in teaching one of the most central and important doctrines of our faith: our union with Christ. The Supper is a wonderful memory aid. But if that's all it is, it does us little good. By being *a means of real participation* in Christ's person and work for those who partake in faith, the Supper truly and powerfully becomes a vital means of grace—not by any transmutation of the elements, but by the Holy Spirit who, through our faith, gives us a real and living share in the life-giving, sanctifying, glorified Christ, Jn 6.51
 - b) Thus, we do not bring Christ down in the Supper. Rather, He brings us up to Himself and gives us a taste of that heavenly meal which He's prepared for us—the main and only course of which is: Himself, wholly and forever, Rev 22.1-5, cf. Col 3.1-3
 - c) **Owen**: One reason we so little value the Lord's Supper and profit so little by it may be because we understand so little of the nature of that special communion with Christ which we have therein.
 - d) **Robert Bruce** (16th c. Puritan at St. Giles) put it best: "Therefore I say, we get no other thing in the Sacrament than we get in the Word. Content yourself with this. But if this is so, the Sacrament is not superfluous. Would you understand then, what new thing you get, what other things you get? I will tell you. Even if you get the same thing which you get in the Word, yet you get that same thing better. What is this

“better”? You get a better grip of the same thing in the Sacrament than you got by the hearing of the Word. That same thing which you possess by the hearing of the Word, you now possess more fully. God has more room in your soul, through your receiving of the Sacrament, than he could otherwise have by your hearing of the Word only.

What then, you ask, is the new thing we get? We get Christ better than we did before. We get the thing which we had more fully, that is, with a surer apprehension than we had before. We get a better grip of Christ now, for by the Sacrament my faith is nourished, the bounds of my soul are enlarged, and so where I had but a little grip of Christ before, as it were, between my finger and my thumb, now I get him in my whole hand, and indeed the more my faith grows, the better grip I get of Christ Jesus. Thus the Sacrament is very necessary, if only for the reason that we get Christ better, and get a firmer grasp of him by the Sacrament than we could have before.”

- e) If this is a meal our Lord has prepared for us, a meal ordained for our good, a meal in which we have the opportunity to get the best Christ better, then why wouldn't we run to it every chance we get?
2. Being united to Christ, with whom every believer is equally united, every believer is necessarily thereby united to one another. And this union with one another in Christ is both signified and cultivated as we partake of the Supper together, 1Cor 10.16-17; Mt 26.27. Calvin, “We partake together as a sign of unconditional and selfless love that has been poured into our hearts by Christ and now pours forth into each other's lives. In this Supper, we learn that we cannot love Christ without loving Him in the brethren.”
3. The Lord's Supper is a bit of heaven come to earth. It's our sustenance in the wilderness as we travel to the Promised Land. The Supper strengthens our faith by giving us a taste of that future promise of eternal fellowship with Him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It's literally a taste of that final feast when faith gives way to sight and we feast on Christ for all eternity as the source and essence of our eternal life and communion with God.
4. In the story of worship that God renews for us each week, He calls us, cleanses us, and consecrates us as those who belong to Him. Then He gives us proof that we truly do: He invites us to sit down and have a meal with Him.

*How does this change the way you see the Lord's Supper?