

The Culture of the Kingdom Fellowship Around the Table

Studio Session 151
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We've been discussing the culture of the kingdom and so far we've addressed the four elements of the culture of the early church as found in Acts 2:42, there it says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers." We've looked at the apostles doctrine, fellowship and we've been looking at the breaking of bread and we'll conclude this series by looking at prayer.

In looking at the breaking of bread, we've moved beyond the consideration of the breaking of bread being the communion. We've looked at the whole matter of bread in the Scripture and concluded that there is bread that brings death and bread that brings life. When man ate of the tree in the garden and he was eating – and this was before the fall, before man sowed, planted, reaped a harvest of grain and prepared bread - what he had in the garden was food from the trees of the garden and from green herbs. Nothing was the result of his labor or toil; he simply gathered and ate from what was already there. In that context he was introduced to the fact that there is some bread, some type of food that will destroy or kill, "Of all the trees of the garden you may freely eat," God had said, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat of it because..." He said, "in the day you eat of it you will surely die." So as a direct and proximate result of eating of that tree death would come. So there was food that brought death. But when Jesus came and spoke of who He was, He said, "I am the Bread of Life come down from heaven."

So there's a bread, which if you eat, will kill you by separating you from God and a bread which if you eat it will give you life by restoring you to God. That's the real picture. The reason for the use of physical bread to be ingested by eating into the human body is that that is the most basic need that the human has, the need for food. So God uses basic earthly things to reveal deep and profound spiritual things. When you bring that concept of the breaking of bread into this discussion, then all of a sudden it moves it into a realm of understanding far beyond just that the early church had the breaking of bread. It gives us something of the culture of the early church based in the need for the human spirit to be fed and that's what we've been pursuing. You know what's amazing to me, it is truly amazing to me how one dimensional our understanding of God has come to be. We have

remained, it would seem, in so to speak 'the outer court' of our understanding of God when the reality is that God speaks about Himself to us to reveal Himself to us with the intent of transforming us into His image and His likeness and the way He begins to speak to us is with carnal natural material things making us familiar with the representational value of these things as they represent spiritual things.

Now one knows that if our preoccupation with spiritual things is devoid of any precedent in Scripture, then we could simply invent what things mean to suit whatever objectives we have in mind and that would have the effect of enslaving the people of God to the will of popular leaders or powerful leaders. Quite the opposite. The Bible is not for that kind of private interpretation because the Bible interprets itself. Paul and the others of the New Testament, and certainly Jesus himself, never introduced something that didn't have some biblical precedent to it. Jesus would say, "I am He of whom the Scriptures speak," or, "You search the Scriptures because you think you have life in them, they testify of Me," so they would speak of the mysteries of which they were the fulfillment, Paul and Jesus. But they would always locate the thing they were saying with it's antecedent in the Scriptures. The same thing is true of our time; there are mysteries meant for our time; things to be revealed that are written in the book that were meant to be revealed in our time. So it is not either that you need new books to be written to have greater understanding of God, nor is it that you need to invent the meaning of Scripture to suit some particular slant of doctrine or some aberration of thought that one wants to put on another. It is that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of knowledge and counsel. So in every epoch those things that God has preserved for that time, the Holy Spirit reveals. When this happens, we are experiencing the revelation of a mystery.

Now these four things that the early church did are well documented in the Scriptures but we have all but disconnected ourselves from these things and they have no real relevance to us. In fact, the way we define these four things – the apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers – is a reflection of our particular traditions and ideas that have arisen over time and with a changed culture. So we do not see these things as the actual cultural underpinnings that they were, we see them and interpret them according to the standards of our present culture and the traditions that undergird those cultures. But if you were to go back and see them again from what they were originally, all of a sudden the mysteries of heaven will be revealed again, to the earth.

So as we spoke of the apostles doctrine, once again we revisited the reality of God speaking to man in every epoch of man and doing so through vessels that He has prepared and vessels that He sends. Fellowship we see as being more than eating a meal or doing some non structured activity together, we see fellowship is actually the way the household of God is arranged. Now the breaking of bread we see as the way that the Body of Christ actually meets together for the purpose of imparting the life of Christ that

is in each member to the whole Body. Now if you look at it that way, then all of a sudden the breaking of bread is more than having a loaf that you may break. So it does not analogize to the Lord's supper even though that seems like a natural analogy; it analogizes to something much greater than the symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Now keep in mind what I'm saying, I'm not saying that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are unimportant, I'm saying they're vastly important, central to the life of the believer. But what I am saying is that the symbology of that, the way that that is symbolized by the communion - the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine - the symbol of that, what we understand the breaking of bread to mean in the New Testament is far greater than the symbol of celebrating the communion.

Now it begins – as we said earlier – with bread that brings life and bread that brings death; the bread that brings death is the bread that feeds the soul; the bread that brings life is the bread of life come down from heaven that feeds the human spirit and reconnects us to our destiny in God. One of the ways that this 'feeding' takes place is within the context of our meetings...within the context of our meetings. And to establish that I will show you a number of examples from the Scriptures beginning in the Old Testament and going through the New Testament - we'll deal with four examples, to be specific - of how the act of eating together was the environment, the milieu in which the Lord chooses to impart the understanding of who He is to those who have gathered in that connection. So while we're eating physical bread in that context, it pleases the Lord to insert the feeding of our spirits by revealing bread from heaven.

The first of these examples is from the Old Testament, it's the book of Exodus chapter 24. Now the story is how Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (the sons of Aaron) and seventy of the elders of Israel go up to the mountain (Mount Sinai) to meet God and this short piece is the recall of that. Verse 9 of Exodus 24 says, "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself but God did not raise His hand against these leaders of Israel. They saw God and they ate and drank." What a fascinating story and an incredible reference; they saw God and they ate and drank. In the majesty of His presence He invites them to sit with Him on this pavement - clear as the sky, pavement of sapphire - He invites them to come up for the purpose of breaking bread as it were, with them.

Now what exactly happened to Nadab, Abihu, Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel in that connection? Well they saw something that no pagan could have ever claimed to have seen about their god. The pagan gods were always gods who demanded sacrifices and the legends and traditions associated with these gods always kept the people at a distance from God. You could never approach God, God was never approachable. And God was always demanding, God always required and the human always performed.

For Nadab and Abihu, for Moses and Aaron, for the seventy elders of Israel, that day their understanding of God changed from all of their experiences with the gods of Egypt who required sacrifices – even sacrifices of their children – they saw a God who sought fellowship with man, they saw a God who did not seek to dominate man, to intimidate man, to keep man at a distance to maintain the mystic of being God. They saw a God who would put Himself, as it were on a footing in which man would be comfortable in the presence of God. In spite of the law, in spite of all of the prohibitions and condemnations inherent in the law, God bridged the gap when He meant with these men, these 74 men who represented the key leadership of all of Israel. And all of them could come back and tell the people, "This was a God in whose presence you could relax." David would tell us the same thing when he said in the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and then speaks of the Lord's provision in these terms, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," in other words, "My fellowship with You is complete and brings me peace even if my enemies are within bow shot of me because You are with me."

So God intended to show the nature, the goodness, the kindness, the security, the wellbeing, the peace that comes from His presence - even in the midst of the enemies - by inviting man, literally, to the table of the Lord. When the Lord himself inaugurated the Lord's supper the night before He was crucified, it was in that time that what was in the hearts of all of those present, was disclosed. Jesus had made this statement, "One of you will betray Me," right there at the table. He waited until they were all present and they were all relaxed in His presence then He tells them the great truths, "One of you will betray Me," and He goes on to explain that they'll smite the Shepherd, the sheep will scatter. That in a little while they would see Him and in a little while they wouldn't see Him again but then in a little while they would see Him, meaning, "You're seeing Me now for a short time, I'll be gone from you for a little while and then I'll be resurrected." Nearly imponderable truths revealed at the table of the Lord.

Now for our purposes, I would like to show you another example that happened on the road to Emmaus. You remember the story, it's recorded in Luke 24, the day of Jesus' resurrection His disciples were on the road to Emmaus and they didn't know who Jesus was so when He was asking them about the events surrounding His own crucifixion, they nearly berated Him for being so unaware of the main events that had occurred in Jerusalem. So He explains the Scriptures to them, He talks to them and I want to pick up at verse 25 of Luke 24, He said to them, "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." Now here is the relevant part, "As they approached the village where they were going, Jesus acted as if He were going further," in other words Jesus wasn't going any further, He just acted as if He

were, "but they urged Him strongly, 'Stay with us for it is nearly evening, the day is almost over,' so He went in to stay with them." Now here is the important part, "And when He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened." You notice that? "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him and He disappeared from their sight. Then they said each to the other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' " Fascinating isn't it? It says He began to explain based upon all the Scriptures, the events that they had heard of that day in Israel. But when they made it to the village of Emmaus, He acted as if He were going on. They prevailed on Him to stay and eat with them. While they were sitting at the table, their eyes were opened. They saw the Lord for who He was while all of them – the Lord and the disciples – were sitting at the table and then of course the Lord disappeared.

The Scriptures are very plain: that God chose to open their eyes around the meal, while they were sitting there. Why? Because the meal produces an environment of relaxation. All that people bring to these events... people often bring their prejudices, their fears, their anxieties, their worries and in the normal discourse people are defensive. But when you sit down together to eat, you are distracted from these defensive positions long enough to be penetrated by the word that needs to come into you. And you are relaxed enough to permit the Christ who is resident within you, to speak through you.

So the whole point of the table is to create true communion and fellowship and in fact the Lord's supper itself, the celebration itself, is how the Lord designed for the Body to come together and to discern that no matter how different we are from each other – in terms of background, cultures, all of these things – that at the table of the Lord, we are the one Body of Christ. If we will not meet in groups that permit us to eat together at least we'll be able – on some occasion – to sit at a table that reminds us that we are the Body of Christ. And when you come to the Lord's supper, when you come to the table of the Lord, if you do not discern the Lord's body then you eat and drink condemnation to yourself because you do not discern the Lord's body. He's not saying that if you are unworthy and you eat and drink the Lord's supper, he's not saying if you are unworthy then you shouldn't do that, he's saying, "If you do not discern the Body when you come to the table of the Lord, then you're eating and drinking condemnation to yourself. It means when you come you should come to discern the Lord's body and that meeting itself is set for when the church comes together, when the whole church comes together in one place. But the norm for our meetings together is as was established in the first century in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts chapter 2 it goes on to say after verse 42, "The apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayers," it says, verse 46, "Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts and they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved."

So they had public meetings in the temple courts, this is where they also took the Lord's supper but they had in their homes, which means a smaller group, an intimate group, "They met in their homes to eat their meals together in the eating and drinking that constituted having their meals, "and the Lord was present with them and revealed Himself to them." The point is, as Paul would say when he addressed the issue to the Corinthians, "Do you not have houses to eat and drink in or do you despise the church of God and shame those who do not have?"

What has been lost to the church of today is the culture of meetings that center around having a meal together. Obviously with these churches that have twenty, thirty thousand people or even two or three hundred people, such a thing is more of a hassle, in fact it's impossible on that level, nearly, and quite a hassle to do even with the smaller churches. The fact is, in the New Testament, the structure of the church was that it met from house to house and it met publicly. But if you will consider that the fellowship of the saints - which we spoke about earlier - is the way the house of God is arranged by patriarchal order and then there are meetings in homes, this makes more sense as to the way the church was and the way it functioned and why. Our culture that has been superimposed upon it has produced no accountability; no one is accountable for their actions, no one is responsible for anybody else. I mean when you have a church of so many hundreds of people, do you even know when the people are present? You have no idea, there's no connection between the people and the leadership. So all that it becomes is a place where quote unquote services are rendered to people but the people have no relationship with each other.

This is the church that is weak and sick, people die prematurely, because there is no discerning of the Body because the culture presently does not provide for intimacy that causes the Body to recognize itself. This culture presently, is a house divided against itself.

To restore the culture of the kingdom, we must go back to a culture that permits - as a regular, habitual functioning - the breaking of bread. I'm Sam Soleyn, we'll continue with the final installment which has to do with the practice of prayer. I'll see you next time, I hope you'll join me, bye bye.