

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | “The Significance of the Supper”
Preached on January 7, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Have you ever wondered what the Lord’s Supper is and why we even do it in church?

Well if that’s you then you are in the right place, for I’m going to be preaching on the Lord’s Supper today, which is also called ‘Communion’. *[pause]*

The reason I’m doing this is because as your pastor, I believe it’s good for us every once in a while to make sure we are all on the same page as to the meaning and purpose of the Lord’s Supper.

Because it’s easy to let the Lord’s Supper turn into an empty ritual, and if so, we have missed the point.

So that’s why every once in a while I like to preach on it. *[pauseeeee]*

As I think about this topic, I know that there are different types of people here...

Some of you come from a Catholic background, so you have a certain understanding of the Lord’s Supper in your mind. *[pause]*

Some of you are rather new to church, or haven’t thought much about the Lord’s Supper, and so you’re wondering, “What even is the Lord’s Supper, and why do we do it?”

Like is it just something that churches do because, you know, they’ve always done it? *[pause]*

Why do we eat bread and drink from a little cup?

Did someone just make it up one day because they thought it would be interesting?

What does it symbolize, if anything?” *[pauseeee]*

And then there are others of you who have a foundational understanding of the Lord’s Supper, but in the routine, you have forgotten how special and significant it really is. *[pauseeee]*

Well this morning, no matter which one of those groups you belong to, you will find out more, and I pray that it will be beneficial for all of us.

And at the end of the sermon, we will go right into actually doing the Lord’s Supper, which I hope will cause it to be more impactful for us today, since the truths will be on our minds and hearts. *[pauseeee]*

Turn to 1 Corinthians 11:17.

This will be my main passage, but I’ll bring in a couple other relevant verses to help us see the significance of the Supper.

I'll READ it for you. *[1 Cor. 11:17-34]*

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he deals with a problem going on within their church: they were not properly doing the Lord's Supper. *[pause]*

I'll get into the specifics of what they were doing wrong later, but in Paul's instructions, he shares some foundational truths about the Lord's Supper. *[pauseeee]*

Look at verse 23, for there Paul says, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread." *[pause]*

Did you notice how Paul worded that?

He received something from the Lord, which he then delivered to the Corinthians.

And what is it?

The teaching and practice of the Lord's Supper, which Christ instituted. *[pauseeeee]*

You see, the Lord's Supper is not something man-made.

It is not just something we do because it's tradition, and we've just always done it. *[pause]*

It's not that we think about what to do at church and decide, "Eh, let's pass out food and drink every now and then, wouldn't that be fun?" *[pause]*

No, we partake of the Lord's Supper because it was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are followers of Christ, but together, we are the body of Christ with Jesus Christ as our head.¹ *[pause]*

He calls the shots, we don't.

We simply follow what He has said, and may it ever be so! *[pauseeee]*

Whenever we are thinking through what we do here at First Baptist, our thoughts are never to be, "Well, have we always done it?" or, "What do we *want* to do?"

No, our thoughts are to be, "What has the Lord said?" *[pauseeee]*

If this is all about human tradition, man-made rules, and made up ceremonies, then count me out.

I don't want to do something just because it's tradition, I don't want to do something just because we made it up...

...I want to do something because Christ said so, for there's no one else worthy of following with our lives! *[pauseeee]*

¹ See Colossians 1:18.

You see, the Lord's Supper is called the Lord's Supper for a reason. *[pause]*

It's not because it's His supper in the sense of He's the only one eating it.

Kinda like when you look in the fridge at work and say, "Oh, that's Jim's supper." *[pause]*

Rather, it's the Lord's Supper because it reflects that He established it.

He gave it to us to be eaten and followed, and it revolves all around Him and His work.
[pauseeeee]

The Lord's Supper is also to be done regularly by His followers. *[pause]*

When he took the bread and the cup, He said, "*Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.*"

So we are to actually eat and drink of this special meal. *[pauseeeee]*

The fact that the Corinthians were partaking of the Lord's Supper adds to the fact that Jesus meant this Supper to be followed and done regularly by His people. *[pause]*

It wasn't just a typical, ordinary meal of the day, but it was something set aside as special.

That's why when Paul confronts the Corinthians, he can say in verse 20, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal." *[pause]*

So obviously there are suppers and then there is the Lord's Supper, which is special. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus also says in verse 26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

This shows us that He wanted this special ordinance to be done regularly, until He comes again.

That's exactly why we as a church partake of the Lord's Supper *regularly* -- we want to follow the Lord's instructions. *[pauseeee]*

So in short, we do the Lord's Supper because it was instituted by Christ to be a continual, regular observance in the church. *[pauseeee]*

Now let's dig deeper into the actual meaning of the Lord's Supper.

And what we see is that the Lord's Supper has past, present, and future aspects to it. *[pause]*

First...

I. The Lord's Supper looks back.

When you gather as a family, aren't there usually important events or moments that are recounted regularly?

They are typically defining moments that have shaped your family into who you are today.
[pause]

You look back and remember, which helps bind you all together in unity and fellowship. [pause]

Well in God's family, Christ has given us something that we are to look back upon, which has created and shaped us into who we are as a church.

And what we remember is Christ's death for us. [pauseee]

This is way more important and life-changing than any earthly family's history, for through Christ's sacrifice, we were forgiven and brought together. [pauseee]

So a prime aspect of the Lord's Supper is looking back and remembering Christ's death on the Cross.

For both when Jesus took the bread and the cup, He said, "Do this *in remembrance of me.*"
[pauseee]

The bread represents His body and the cup represents His shed blood.

They are physical elements that help us to remember by vividly representing His body and blood.

So by taking, eating, and drinking, we are to remember Christ's work on the Cross.

And so the Lord's Supper is a built-in, continual reminder to the church of Christ's death for us.
[pauseee]

Some churches have pushed Christ's death to the side and don't often talk about it, for it has become more about tips for life or self-help, positive messages.

But may that never be what we are about!

May we preach Christ crucified² because it is only because of Christ crucified that we have been saved! [pauseee]

The Lord's Supper helps us focus, time and time again, on the central truth and reality of our faith, Jesus' sacrifice for our sins.

This is why He said, "This is my body, *which is for you,*" and, "This cup is the *new covenant in my blood.*" [pauseee]

² A reference to 1 Corinthians 1:23.

He gave His body up on the Cross for us to pay the penalty that we deserved for our sins by dying for us.

And His blood was shed, establishing and confirming the New Covenant, whereby we receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. *[pauseeeee]*

The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance.

We remember Christ and what He has done for us, which we didn't deserve.

And so Communion should be done with grateful remembrance from start to finish. *[pauseeee]*

Truth be told, we are forgetful people.

Think about all of the things in your life that you are forgotten about.

And you may be thinking, "I can't even think about them because I forgot what they were."

Exactly -- we are forgetful. [pauseeee]

God knows that we are prone to forgetfulness, and notice, though, how He treats us.

He doesn't merely shame us for our forgetfulness, and keep scolding us by saying, "You guys can't remember anything! Come on, get your act together!"

No, He's not like a harsh schoolmaster, but He's a loving Father.

For though He knows full well that we are forgetful, He aids us in grace by providing a built-in reminder, so that we don't forget.

And so we can remember, remember, remember. *[pauseeeee]*

We need to remember Christ's work because He did such an amazing thing for us.

We need to remember Christ's sacrifice because it's a huge part of our lives.

We need to remember because it's what saved us and what brought us together. [pause]

If we can't remember the most foundational, transformational truth and reality of what Christ has done for us, then where will our focus be?

What will we become about, if we lose sight of Christ's death for us? [pauseeeee]

The Lord's Supper helps us to continually look back in gratitude and joy, reflecting upon the significance of what Christ did for us on the Cross.

That though we are all sinners, deserving of condemnation because we have sinned against a holy and good God, Christ died for us. [pause]

That though we didn't deserve forgiveness, Christ shed His blood, so that our sin debt could be wiped clean forever.

And it's simply through faith in what Jesus Christ did for us that we are saved. *[pause]*

He did the work, and we simply trust and receive! *[pauseeeee]*

Just think of it...

Think of all of the sins and failures that you have done in your life.

Some of you may even be thinking, "I'm a lost cause. God would never forgive me for what I've done. Do you know what I've done?"

Well let me tell you this morning, you are not a lost cause, for no one is outside the reach of God's grace. *[pause]*

He is willing and able to save *anyone* who comes in faith!

So you can be forgiven today.

You no longer have to keep experiencing the guilt and shame that you feel, but you can feel the relief of forgiveness. *[pauseeee]*

What freedom! What relief!

Repent of your sins today and trust in Jesus Christ, who died for you.

And you will be able to say joyously, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe!"³ *[pauseeee]*

The Lord's Supper looks back, but that's not the only aspect of it, for we also see that...

II. The Lord's Supper has special significance now.

I remember as a middle schooler sitting in history class thinking, "What good does this do for me now?"

Anyone else ever think that?

To me, it was all just details of what happened in the past that had no bearing or special significance for my life in the present. *[pause]*

Sadly, that's the same way we can tend to think of the Lord's Supper. *[pause]*

Growing up in the church, I knew that the Lord's Supper reflected back to the Cross, so that we could remember Jesus' death...

³ "Jesus Paid It All" by Elvina M. Hall (1865).

...But to me, that's all it was. *[pause]*

Now certainly, that's a big part of it, but there's actually more to it -- it has special significance now. *[pause]*

Flip over to 1 Corinthians 10:16.

Paul is talking about eating food offered to idols in a pagan temple, and how eating it is incompatible with eating the Lord's Supper.

And he says this, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ?" *[pause]*

He's talking about the Lord's Supper and he explains that partaking of the cup and the bread are actually "participation" in the body and blood of Jesus.

The word can also mean 'fellowship' or 'sharing'. *[pause]*

The idea is that when we partake of the Lord's Supper, it actually shows that we share in the benefits of Christ's death for us.

And how do we share in those benefits?

Because we have fellowship with Christ and are in union with Him through faith. *[pauseeee]*

We can easily have a "detached" view of what's going on, where the elements just get us to think about Jesus. *[pause]*

They *do* get us to think about Christ, but actually, there's also something deeper going on, a sharing and fellowship, a closeness with Christ.

It's a time of communion with Him. *[pause]*

This is why it is sometimes called 'communion' because in a way, we are communing with Christ.

It shows our union with Him, and our close fellowship in relationship with Him because of His death on the Cross. *[pause]*

As we eat and drink, we are acknowledging that we need Christ everyday -- we need the spiritual nourishment that He provides in our lives.

We are affirming our faith in Him, and partaking in something that reveals our continuing fellowship with our Savior.

And we are showing that we are partakers of the benefits of His death. *[pauseeee]*

This is why only true believers in Jesus should participate.

Because they are the only ones who have been saved and have that share in the benefits of Christ's death. *[pauseeee]*

Now let's reflect upon this truth for a moment in our hearts...

To think that the Lord Jesus Christ wants to have fellowship with us is *staggering!*

He is the Creator of the universe, the radiance of the glory of God, and the image of the invisible God.⁴

"All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."⁵ *[pause]*

Who are we that we deserve such a privilege and honor?

Who are we that He would want to commune with us?...

Us, who fail time and time again.

Us, who fall short, and revert back, way too often to foolishness.

But that's Lord, gracious and patient and loving to sinners in need of grace. *[pauseeee]*

So the Lord's Supper is a time of special fellowship with our Lord, showing our union with Him and displaying our share in the benefits of His death.

But that's not all, for it's also a time of special fellowship with each other, showing our unity in Christ. *[pause]*

Look at verse 17 of chapter 10, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." *[pauseeee]*

As we all partake of Communion together, we show that what the Lord did wasn't *just* for us as individuals, but for us as a church, too. *[pause]*

The Christian faith is not meant to be lived alone.

There is no such thing as a lone Christian in the Bible, but they are always to be connected to a church. *[pauseeee]*

In our culture, everything has become about the individual, but our faith in Christ is supposed to be done *in community*. *[pause]*

By Christ's death, He unified us together, and we reflect that as we eat and drink together from the Lord's table.

⁴ Hebrews 1:2-3 & Colossians 1:15.

⁵ Colossians 1:16b-17.

So the Lord's Supper actually reflects our unity in Christ. *[pause]*

This is part of why what the Corinthians were doing was so wrong.

During the Lord's Supper, the richer Christians would go ahead and eat first and eat a lot and would get drunk, while the poorer Christians would go hungry. *[pause]*

How is that reflecting the unity that the Lord's Supper demonstrates?

How is that reflecting the sacrificial death of Jesus, which the Lord's Supper reminds us of?

It wasn't, and that's why Paul can say that they aren't even eating of the Lord's Supper when they do this because it was so antithetical to it. *[pauseeee]*

This is why we must examine ourselves before partaking, for we do not want to live in ways that contradict the truth behind the Lord's Supper.

But we are to reflect: "Am I living in accord with the self-giving sacrifice of Christ by how I treat others?"

"Is anything I'm doing showing that I despise the church of God and treat others with contempt?"

"Am I reflecting the unity that Christ has accomplished by His death?" *[pause]*

We must do this because God takes it seriously, and that's why some of the Corinthians were facing disciplinary judgment by God.

So we must examine ourselves, not to look for perfection, but to discern if how we have been treating others is in line with the gospel. *[pauseeeee]*

You see, this is so important because whenever we do the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming the work of Christ to each other and to the world. *[pause]*

1 Corinthians 11:26 says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." *[pause]*

Everytime we do the Lord's Supper we are proclaiming the Lord's death!

The word for 'proclaiming' here is to announce publicly.

So when we partake, we proclaim loudly to the world about what Christ has done for us, and how He has united us together.

When we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, we are visibly showing the giving of Christ's body and blood for us.

We are showing that what He did has saved us, united us, and has caused us to cling to Him for life.

It's announcing to the world, "Christ is our everything! He died for us! We are only united, forgiven, and made alive because of Him!" *[pauseee]*

This is why we must not cloud that message by how we treat others.

And this is why we must not neglect to partake of the Lord's Supper, but to do it regularly together as a church. *[pauseee]*

The Lord's Supper has special significance now when we do it.

We commune and fellowship with the Lord, and show our oneness with each other as we do it together.

And we proclaim the Lord's death. *[pause]*

Let's never forget about the present blessings and implications of doing the Lord's Supper! *[pauseee]*

Not only does the Lord's Supper look back, and have present significance, but also...

III. The Lord's Supper looks forward.

One of the things that brings joy is to watch a child in eager anticipation. *[pause]*

Whether it's in anticipation of Christmas, their birthday, a new toy, or some fun event - the joyous anticipation of children is a great thing to watch. *[pause]*

I think of when my children look forward to something fun, they just keep asking, asking, and asking if it has arrived yet because they are just *so excited*.

The glee on their faces just makes your heart happy. *[pauseee]*

Well did you know that the Lord's Supper is supposed to cause us to look forward in joyous anticipation? *[pause]*

In 3 out of 4 of the Gospel accounts, during the Lord's Supper, there is this common verse, where Jesus says this...

"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."⁶ *[pause]*

⁶ Matthew 26:29.

So the disciples got to eat and drink of the Lord's Supper with Jesus, but Jesus was making it clear that they weren't going to be able to eat and drink it with Him until the coming Kingdom. *[pauseeee]*

Now think about what that would do in the disciples from then on...

Every Lord's Supper that they partook in, they would be reminded that someday they would be with Christ again, and they would eat and drink with Him once more.

So the Lord's Supper actually causes us to have anticipation for Christ's return. *[pause]*

As we partake, we remember that someday we will get to eat and drink with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in person with utmost joy!

So it causes us to look forward in joyous anticipation. *[pause]*

This Lord's Supper is but a glimpse of the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, described in Revelation 19, and which will be filled with supreme joy and gladness.

So every time we eat and drink of it, we look with confident hope and longing for that Day! *[pause]*

Just listen to Isaiah's description of the Marriage Supper...

"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."

And then it goes on to say...

"He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken."⁷
[pause]

Talk about joy! Talk about something to look forward to!

A great feast, death no more, and tears wiped away forever.

I'm definitely looking forward to that day, aren't you? *[pauseeeee]*

The Lord's Supper causes us to look forward, for it points us to the most amazing feast that will come. *[pauseeee]*

Before you get married, you look for a caterer, and you get to do taste tests of the food that they will make, but it's nothing like eating the food on the actual wedding day with everyone there.

⁷ Isaiah 25:6-8.

So also, the Lord's Supper is a special time of tasting and eating and experiencing fellowship with Christ, but it points to the greater feast that we will enjoy with Christ in person. *[pauseee]*

This should revolutionarize every time that we partake of the Lord's Supper, as we are filled with joy, looking forward with hope to that Day.

We think, "Yes, Lord, this is great, but I long for that Day to be with you forever and enjoy your presence, where there is fullness of joy!"⁸ *[pauseee]*

You see, the Lord's Supper should be a serious time because we do not want to be flippant about it, but it should also be a joyous time, as we celebrate what Christ did and long to see Him. *[pause]*

So as you partake this morning, remember to look forward, saying to yourself, "Lord, I love you, and I can't wait for that Day!

This bread and cup points me to that great marriage supper of the Lamb when Christ comes again." *[pauseee]*

So with remembrance, reflection, examination, and joy...

Let's partake of the Lord's Supper, remembering and reflecting upon Christ!

He's the reason we are here, the reason why we are saved, and the reason why we can have abounding hope. *[pauseee]*

When we partake in the Lord's Supper in a few minutes and in the coming months, let's remember what it's really about and what all is involved in it. *[pauseee]*

We get to be involved in a time of remembrance and reflection upon what Christ did for us!

We get to commune with the Lord and proclaim His death to the world.

And we get to do something that looks forward to that great feast with Christ when He returns. *[pauseee]*

Is Communion an important part of your Christian life? If not, realize its prominence in your faith.

There's a reason why Jesus instituted it in the church.

So will you join me now in having our minds focused, and our hearts prepared as we partake in the Lord's Supper?

⁸ See Psalm 16:11.