

THE SANCTIFYING POWER OF A GOOD MEMORY WHEN WE COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE - Sunday, July 30th, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.

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1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. {18} For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. {19} For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. {20} Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, {21} for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. {22} What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. {23} For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; {24} and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." {25} In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." {26} For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. {27} Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. {28} But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. {29} For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. {30} For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. {31} But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. {32} But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world."

What should happen when we gather together to take communion? I say **'should'** happen because, unlike the teaching of the doctrine of transubstantiation, these changes aren't **automatic**. They are conditioned upon the faith and obedience of the participants.

There are three **keys for transformation** when we come to the Lord's Table. All of them are cued up in our lives by our **remembrance** of them. This is why Paul so deeply underscores Jesus' instruction regarding the importance of **remembering** at the table. This is different from just **having memories**. We all know what it's like to have **memories** come flooding over our minds in leisure moments - pictures that are precious, events that bring deep feeling, emotions that are stirred, sometimes without our even summoning any conscious effort.

This is **not** the process Jesus described. He's not talking about being **invaded** by **memories**. He's talking about **calling events and truths to remembrance**. He's talking about **summoning** remembrance by an act of will. He's talking about **thinking through the meaning of what we're doing**:

1 Corinthians 11:24-25 - "...and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' {25} In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"

This active, concentrated remembering is important, but it's important for a **reason**. It's important because it **initiates** the miracle of the Lord's Table in our lives. It's not important as an **end in itself**. It's important because it makes communion miracles possible. So today we're going to behold three genuine **miracles** - three wonderful **transformations** - that are to take place as we remember what we're called to remember at the Lord's Table:

- 1) **AS WE COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE WE REMEMBER THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS IN A WAY THAT ORDERS THE REST OF OUR LIVES AND PROMPTS DEEPER DISCIPLESHIP**

1 Corinthians 11:26 - "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **until He comes.**"

The cup and the bread point in **two** directions. We look **back to the cross** - at the blessings purchased through the new covenant in Christ's blood. And we also look **forward to the Second Coming of Jesus** - at the hope that lies before us - to order our lives in preparation for it.

Again, remember our key point. **Knowing** about the Second Coming does absolutely nothing for us. **Remembering** it changes everything about us.

Think of the husband out golfing who suddenly **remembers** he promised to take his wife to a doctor's appointment. Think of the student who is out socializing with his friends who suddenly **remembers** he has an assignment due for tomorrow's class. Or better yet, think of Peter cursing and denying Jesus when he suddenly **remembers** Jesus' prophetic words about his actions. In each of the cases I've just mentioned those acts of **remembrance** stop the person cold. They're times of radically changed perspective. They're times of totally adjusted activity. They're times, especially in Peter's case, of a totally transformed view of his actions and attitude.

This is the difference between **knowing** about something and **remembering** it. Remembering Jesus' Second Coming is **knowing** about it and **feeling its impact**. If that truth isn't changing the details of your day, you aren't remembering it with its full weight.

If I can spend all my money on yourself and my family while the lost are perishing I'm not remembering the Second Coming. If I can watch profanity filled movies and listen to music that promotes a lifestyle that takes people to Hell I'm not remembering the Second Coming. If I can walk out of my marriage vows without a sense that my commitment to Jesus means you should stay and give restoration another chance, I'm not remembering the Second Coming. If I can date an unsaved partner, usually with the false hope that I'll lead them to Jesus by my very act of disobedience in dating him or her in the first place, I'm not remembering the Second Coming. If I'm a young person and I can disobey my parents and justify it by telling myself they're simply out of touch or out of date, I'm not remembering the Second Coming.

Listen to how the apostle John describes the purifying effects of remembering the Lord's coming - **1 John 3:2-3** - "**Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. {3} And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him *purifies himself* just as He is pure."**

If you truly ***remember*** these things when you come to the Lord's Table, miracles will start to happen in your life. There will come a ***transubstantiation of your heart*** into the very character and nature of Jesus Christ as you partake at the communion table.

Now let's look at the second remembering miracle that should take place as we partake:

- 2) **AS WE COME TO THE LORD'S TABLE WE ARE CALLED TO REMEMBER TO EXAMINE OUR HEARTS FOR AREAS WHERE FRESH REPENTANCE IS NEEDED TO AWAKEN SPIRITUAL LIFE IN AREAS LONG GROWN COLD AND DULL**

1 Corinthians 11:28 - "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Note the order in Paul's words. "*...examine himself...in so doing (examining himself) he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" No one is to come to the Lord's Table without ploughing up his heart with fresh examination. Another dimension is added here. Obviously we are to look **back** to the accomplishments of the Cross. We are to look **ahead** to the Second Coming and remember it daily. And we are to look **inside** to keep our own hearts awake and freshly responsive to God's redemptive, transforming grace.

This call to self-examination is crucial. It means there are things God **could** do in my heart at the Table, but **won't** do unless I see the **need** for them to be done. That is probably the most important sentence in this sermon.

This is the cause of much **kingdom transformation being left undone in our lives - year after year after year**. Most of us look at our lives the way we look at an iceberg in the ocean. We only readily see the small portion that's above the surface. Most of it is under the cover of the water. Whatever you think there is of substance **above** the surface, it's certainly only a small portion of the whole reality when you take into account what lies **under** the surface.

Psalm 19:12-14 - "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. {13} Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. {14} Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer."

All great people remember this. All great people are deathly serious and diligent about **self-examination**. They don't **assume** things are OK. They are gracious with others but they don't let themselves off lightly. They are good at **telling themselves the truth**. This is the most important form of honesty there is.

Of course, this need not be a purely *negative* experience. It only *begins* negative. For every dark blemish and hidden stain on my soul - stains with which the Devil (and some people) would pound me into the ground in despair and condemnation - the Holy Spirit would entreat with the words, "***Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound!***"

But grace doesn't abound *automatically*. Grace abounds at the Table, surely, but it is ushered in through the self-examination and faith of the participant. Grace doesn't cover unexposed, ignored, cherished sin.

If the communion table is a *non-transforming* experience for many evangelical church goers, here's the reason. We've packaged the whole service. We're used to coming to the table. We know the songs. We can anticipate the words. We can reflexively push past God's radar into our souls.

O how careful I have to be about this! I can cease to remember the things God *used to* speak to me about.

Do you want fresh communion miracles to take place in your soul?

Turn yourself inside out when you come to the Table. Accelerate the work of the Holy Spirit at the Lord's Table. Let a man and let a woman examine themselves. Turn over stagnant soil. ***Relinquish self-defense*** at the Table. Let God's joy enter fresh terrain in your being.

Now let's close looking at miracle number three:

- 3) **AS WE COME TOGETHER TO THE LORD'S TABLE THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO FORM THE BODY OF CHRIST IN VISIBLE, SELF-PROCLAIMING PRESENCE IN THIS DARK, DIVIDED WORLD**

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 - "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. {18} For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. {19} For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. {20} Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, {21} for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. {22} What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you."

These are challenging words. Some of the words carry a hard explanation - hard in the sense that we don't like them, and, especially in recent years, the church has come up with whole theological systems to reinterpret them or explain them away entirely. I'll get to that in just a minute.

First, and more obviously, Paul deals with two forms of practical ***disfunctionality*** in the Body of Christ at the Lord's Table in Corinth. First, the people were being ***divisive among themselves***, and, second, the rich were ***ignoring the needs of the poor***. And the significant statement Paul makes about both of these groups is summed up in very scathing words in **verse 19** - "***....Do you despise the church of God?***"

Apparently, not everyone who comes to church ***loves*** the Body of Christ. In fact, not everyone who comes ***regularly***, and partakes consistently at the Lord's Table ***loves*** the Body of Christ. Many regular attenders, and many consistent participants actually ***despise*** the Body of Christ. That's a shocking reality to ponder.

There is more, according to Paul, happening at the communion service than first meets the eye. In fact, there is much more going on - in the invisible realm - than even many of the participants realize because God is acting right then and there, judging those sins against His Body:

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 - "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. {30} For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. {31} But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. {32} But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world."

Christ won't allow His Body to be sinned against. The Lord's Table is so central as an expression of the reality of Christ's grace, love and presence by His Holy Spirit, that it can't be ignored and "**despised**" without consequence. Paul says Jesus comes with the rod of discipline. People get sick. People get weak. People die. And it's not because Jesus **isn't** loving and merciful, but precisely because He **is**.

He refuses to allow people to sink deeper and deeper into habits that will eventually lead them into a lost eternity. He loves them too much to let that happen. Paul says Jesus comes in stern discipline so we will "**....not be condemned along with the world**"(32).

We **know** how the world is going to be condemned when Jesus comes again. Jesus doesn't want that for us. His discipline is to **prevent** that from happening.

But **why** is this such an important thing to Jesus? People commit lots of sins. Why are **these** sins so devastating?

All of this has to do with the purpose of the church "**proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes**" through the Lord's Table (26). People are meant to **see** the fruit of Christ's Passion and the reality of His presence - not in the Roman Catholic tradition of **transformed elements** - but in the spiritual reality of **transformed people**.

Here's the potent truth of this text. The church is not a **picture** of the Body of Christ. The church **is** the Body of Christ. And the most telling and most genuine **expression** of that reality is how we function when we don't get our way, or when we get mistreated, or when we have to go out of our way to sacrifice our convenience or means for those who are in no position to return the favor.

Division is a sin against the Body of Christ. Indifference to those in need is a sin against the Body of Christ. This kind of activity is so tragic because it presents a **false Christ** to the world. God wants to take you and me and relate us to each other like **Jesus** related Himself to those who persecuted Him and those who rejected Him and those who needed Him.

If that kind of transformation doesn't happen in your soul when you come to the Lord's Table - if you cherish the personal pain of some rejection or mistreatment in the Body of Christ (I know we all **experience** this at times, but if you refuse to forsake it and repent of it) - you're parading a **fake** Christ.

And it's a terrible sin to **misrepresent** Christ. You know how **you** feel when you're misrepresented. Now consider that we're the Body of Christ at the Lord's Table. It's a terrible thing to present a fractured, bitter, unforgiving Christ in our actual experience. This invites the Lord's chastening discipline.

I will never forget the words of a man who left this church in the heat of a divisive situation. They have haunted me for years. ***"Christians are exactly like everyone else when they've been wronged."***

That is exactly the argument Paul addresses in a very difficult verse in our text:

1 Corinthians 11:19 - "For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you."

Factions reveal the genuine Christian. They are not right and they are not good. But the genuine believer rises to the top when controversy and contention comes. The proof of my faith isn't just revealed in my correct beliefs. The proof is my Christlike response. You can tell the ***real deal*** in terms of the life and presence of Jesus by the way people react to criticism, mistreatment, and personal hurt. Where the Holy Spirit is busily forming Jesus in the heart, people ***look*** and ***act*** just like Jesus did. They lay down their very lives in love. They ***proclaim*** the real Body of Christ to the watching church community and world.

How long would a communion service take if we had to sort out all the quarrels and divisions among us? How long would the communion service take if, before we partook, we had to make every enemy our friend, every wrong righted, and have every ounce of bitterness and unforgiveness removed?

God wants to work miracles at the Table. The Holy Spirit wants to break into the ritual of the communion service with a vengeance. He wants to turn this place into a living, vital expression of the very Body of Christ.