

The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective: Communion—A Feast of Celebration and Contemplation

1 Corinthians 11

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In this study we are in that wonderful and seminal text for the Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11. We get the opportunity to revisit this text which is unfathomable in anticipating the feast with the Lord at the Table of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:23-33 says,

23 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, 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 also he took the cup, 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 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— 34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

The grass withers. The flower fades. This is God's Word. It abides forever. By His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Knowing the importance of the Lord's Supper, throughout the ages the church has always been concerned about avoiding two issues around the Lord's Supper. Knowing it is a divinely designed observance that upon attendance and proper embracing, God has designed it that we might grow. In fact in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 it talks about us coming together for the better not for the worse. God

has designed what we are about to sit and do for us to come together for the better. He has designed this for our growth in Christ as a means of grace to grow in the Lord but we also know that even at Corinth what had been designed as an asset had become a liability. In fact, instead of people profiting in a positive way from the Lord's Supper, the Lord has visited the church at Corinth with discipline and judgment. It was not the judgment that comes upon unbelievers but it was the chastising discipline of the hand of a Father upon His children because they were not coming to the Table properly, knowing that it's designed for your growth in the Lord and knowing that it can be misused and knowing that God has put this here to be focused upon until He comes again.

The history of the church for 2000 years has said, "Don't allow us to fall into handling the supper of the Lord superficially." For instance, "We haven't had the Lord's Supper so let's do it" or "Let's do the Lord's Supper because it kind of peps you up a bit" where it is a superficial, memorial meal. But by the way, we have also wanted to avoid superstition that the elements themselves will do something. Let me make this very clear. Contrary to what can and what is taught, the Lord's Supper is not Jesus coming down and becoming apart of these elements. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father until He comes again. The elements bring us up to Him. He doesn't come down to the elements. He has already come down and gone to the cross. Now His Holy Spirit brings to you faith in Christ so that spiritually you sit now at a feast.

This feast is not like some of the feasts you have been having in the last month or so, like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. If you can just get past those meals with some reasonable expectation that you might see the error on the weight scales when this is over that would be good. Those are great feasts but this is a different feast. This is a feast that is satisfying. It is deeply enriching. It is a spiritual feast. It is not a spread of the elements. It is the elements that bring us to Christ and Christ meets with us by His Spirit that we feast upon Him. This is a glorious feast that we come to in which Christ doesn't come down and get sacrificed again. On the contrary, Christ because of His sacrifices uses this to lift us up to Him, to focus upon Him. So that even our Christian life, our ministry and everything else takes its proper place and we see Jesus. We rejoice in the cross.

Therefore instead of superficiality and superstition we want its sacred use and out of this text you can see three things that I would like for you to think about. They are celebration, contemplation and anticipation. Think about the Table as a Table of celebration. We have so much to celebrate because Christ has come, died on the cross, has risen and is coming again. So it is a Table of celebration but it is also a Table of contemplation. Notice how the text tells us to examine ourselves. It is a time to discern the body. It is a time to look at our relationship with the Lord, His Word and each other.

It is a time of contemplation and it is also a time of anticipation because this meal has been given to us until we arrive at another meal. What is that meal yet to

come? Back here was a meal in the Old Covenant called the Passover in which a lamb was slain. That bloody meal sent us forward to Jesus. Jesus has come and the Lamb has given Himself and the blood has been shed so now we have this bloodless meal that we will do until He comes again according to the text. Now we have another meal then and that's called the marriage feast. That's when we will sit down in the presence of the Lord rejoicing as His bride has now been gathered among Himself but until then we are at this meal anticipating His coming. Now we are redeemed but not yet has it been brought to consummation.

So if you would take these three words with me as we come to the feast of the Lord, there is so much to share on celebration, contemplation and anticipation but I'm just going to give you two brief thoughts under each one as we come to the Table this first Lord's Day of 2010. This is our year of jubilee, celebrating what God has done, contemplating what God has done and anticipating what God will yet do with Briarwood as Briarwood turns 50 this fall. We can do the same thing also right here at this Table.

So I want to give you a couple of thoughts around celebration, contemplation and anticipation. Here are two thoughts about celebration. The first one is to celebrate that we have a feast of the Redeemer and redemption to come and sit with Him today. Celebrate that there is a feast. The Bible says the "wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ" (Romans 6:23). We have Good News! There is a Redeemer and there is redemption. Celebrate the Good News that salvation is offered and sure in Jesus Christ. There is a Redeemer. We have eternal life and we can enjoy that redemption in Jesus Christ. Amazing grace, we can sing because redemption is sure and secure in Jesus Christ. There is a feast of victorious redemption because of a Victorious Redeemer.

The second thought on celebration is there is not only a feast of redemption and a Redeemer that we today celebrate, but you want to be here, while millions have said 'no', you have said, 'yes.' Now why was that? Are you just a little smarter than everybody else or maybe a little better than everybody else? Are we here at the Table of the Lord because we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior? The Table does not make you a Christian. We are here today because we are Christians. We are coming to the Table because we are believers in Christ. Why are you a believer in Christ? Why is it that you are here today? Maybe we are just smarter than those other people. Maybe we are just a little bit better than they are. No, the same love that sent Jesus that we can celebrate a Redeemer, is the same love that came after you to bring you to Him. I was blind but now I see. I was lost, now I have been found. I was wretched and undone, now I am redeemed and whole in Jesus Christ.

This is a great Sunday for me because Cindy will be singing one of my favorite hymns from the Trinity Hymnal while we take the Lord's Supper and I love that hymn, *Ah Holy Jesus*. I would like to read to you my other favorite hymn. Isaac

Watts wrote this hymn titled *How Sweet and Awesome is the Place*. It's not sung very much in the church, but it's so deep.

How sweet and awesome is the place With Christ with-in the doors,
While everlasting love displays The choicest of her stores.
While all our hearts and all our songs Join to admire the feast,
Each of us cries, with thankful tongue, "Lord, why was I a guest?"
Why was I made to hear Thy voice, And enter while there's room,
When thou-sands make a wretched choice, And rather starve than come?
'Twas the same love that spread the feast That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste, And perished in our sin.
Pit-y the nations, O our God, Con-strain the earth to come;
Send Thy victorious Word abroad, And bring the strangers home.
We long to see Thy churches full, That all the chosen race
May, with one voice and heart and soul, Sing Thy redeeming grace.

The same love that sent Him drew you to Him. The Lord has brought us and we have much to celebrate. There is a Redeemer and I am redeemed. My Redeemer has found me. Oh the joy, the privilege, the victory that is found in Christ the Savior! So celebrate that there is redemption and a Redeemer. The Redeemer has brought us and we are redeemed if we know Christ as Lord and Savior. The same grace that surely accomplished our redemption is the grace that brings us to surety in Him so that all that are in Him are not lost and they all belong to Him. So now there is contemplation.

The second word is contemplation. How much is there for us to contemplate. Here are two thoughts on contemplation also. They are not original thoughts from me. They came from my professor in seminary. The first thought is as I sit at this Table and realize that Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay for my sins I am reminded that I am a great sinner. In fact, my sin is greater than I ever dared to imagine. Look at what had to be done to save me. Please notice the choice of my words – *I am* a great sinner. Now I praise God I'm a saved sinner. I praise God I'm a forgiven sinner. I praise God I'm born again. I praise God I'm being changed. I'm praising God I'm growing in grace as a sinner but I am, in and of myself, a great sinner.

That brings me to my second thought on contemplation. I am a great sinner but I have a greater Savior. "Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound" (Romans 5:20). I have a Savior that is not only able to pay for all of my sins and free me from the penalty of sin, but I have a Savior who can free me and has freed me from the power of sin and is delivering me from the practice of sin and one day will deliver me from the presence of sin. I'm sitting at the Table of a Savior whose love is satisfying, sovereign and whose grace, mercy and love is sovereign, supreme, sufficient and it is satisfying.

I know you are living in a lot of challenging days in this time. I know there are vocational challenges, family issues, personal issues and everything but today as you and I realize that we are great sinners, own it. We are not people that needed a little help up from a religious guru. We needed a Savior and our God is our Savior. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Our Savior is greater than our sins and this Sovereign Savior, supreme and sufficient, satisfies the soul. Come to Him today. Focus on Him today. I know we have concerns with other areas of our lives – family, children, friends, everything – but today focus on that Savior. Hallelujah, what a Savior! So we have touched on celebration and contemplation where I'm a great sinner but I have a greater Savior.

The third thing is anticipation. Now I'm saved, but not yet. Has it been brought to consummation? Now I am redeemed but not yet. Am I with my Redeemer? Now the Lord has won the victory but not yet has it all been brought to consummation. So I would like for you to anticipate two things. The first is that I have been saved into a vital, unbreakable relationship with Jesus Christ and therefore I have a Savior that tomorrow He's my Savior. Next week He's my Savior, into eternity He's my Savior and my Savior is unconquerable and unstoppable. Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ. I have a Savior and as dear as He is to me today, He will not be diminished one bit tomorrow. He will be unconquerable and unstoppable tomorrow. Who can bring a charge against God's elect? God has justified us in His Son. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Christ ever lives to hold us and this leads to the second thought on anticipation.

The second thought on anticipation is the best is yet to come. The world always has to go back. The have to have radio stations that play music from the 60's, 70's, 80's, perhaps 50's although most who would want that are not in the world any more. Maybe some are, I don't know but it's amazing when you live in the world you always look back. When you live in Christ your best days are yet ahead. That's why you can number your days and redeem the days. Your best days are ahead. The best is yet to come because Christ is coming again. I don't care where you are or where I am or what we've had or what we've enjoyed as great as it might have been in Christ to this moment, because the best is yet to come.

I want to conclude with a couple of thoughts as we come to the Table. Think about celebration, contemplation and anticipation. This is 2010 and 50 years ago a young man was called to plant a church here and his name was Dr. Frank Barker. He is still a young man and praise God the church that was planted is still here loving Christ and wanting to serve Christ. The Lord marks these kind of things out 50 years in what's called a year of jubilee. I look forward in going through this with you coming up but go ahead as 52 Sundays stretch in front of us and celebrate what God has done. We want to contemplate the height, the depth, the breadth and the length of what God has done but we want to anticipate what God would have for us yet to do. Take these three word,

celebrate, contemplate and anticipate because we don't live in the past. We want to praise the Lord for the past but we don't live in the past. God has us here for a reason as we move into the future. We have a good foundation but it's not just to rest on the foundation. It is to keep seeking the Lord's grace and mercy for what yet He will do.

So take these three words that guide us through the Lord's Supper every time as we move through this year. I hope and pray that God allows Briarwood to be faithful and effective for His glory until all of His chosen race has been called in, to all the nations. I hope and pray that by God's grace He will allow us to be faithful not only in celebrating what He has done but, Lord, let us not shut the door. Let us not turn out the lights until Jesus Christ comes again. Let us hold forth the Light of Life to this world until everybody in Birmingham and around the world has the opportunity to say 'yes' to Jesus Christ.

The last takeaway is as you celebrate, contemplate and anticipate, celebrate that there is a Redeemer and that He has redeemed you and brought you. You have come to Him because He came after you. The One who bought you also brought you. As you celebrate that, contemplate that He did that overwhelming me a great sinner and bringing me to Himself a greater Savior. Anticipate what He will do as He grows you in these coming days and the best is yet to come. He is coming again. Then I want you in these moments to fill your heart with the beauty of your Savior as you come to His Table and feast upon Him.

This year I have decided to go back and read C.S. Lewis' afresh and anew which means you have to go to the Chronicles of Narnia, which means I've already started, which means I'm already at the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, which means I've already gotten to chapter 12 and I love this moment. There is Aslan, the Lion Christ. There is Peter, Susan, Edmond (the one I identify with who is always in trouble) and Lucy. I married Lucy. I love the adventure of these four kids and Aslan, the redeemer, the Lion of Judah but when Edmond comes under the dominion of evil and is captured by evil and the Witch, Lucy, wide eyed, comes up to Aslan and says to Aslan, "Aslan, is there anything to be done to save Edmond?" Aslan looks at Lucy and says, "All shall be done."

Is there anything to be done to save me? All shall be done to save me. My Savior at the cross, my Savior holding me fast, all shall be done. That Savior went to the cross, all shall be done. When He got to the cross they mocked Him in Matthew 27 saying, "If You're the Son of God come down and we'll believe in You." There wouldn't have been anything to believe in if He had come down because He was the Son of God He had stayed there. "You said You would tear down the temple in three days and rebuild it so save Yourself." The cat call came in their final mockery and blasphemy by the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees, as they said, "Look, He saved others He cannot save Himself." They had no idea that their mockery was the Gospel. He saved others, He cannot save Himself. One, He didn't need to save Himself. Two, He didn't come to save Himself, He came

to die on that cross to save you and me. All has been done. Come to His Table. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments that we can be together. Thank You for the privilege to partake of the supper that You have designed for us to be refreshed and renewed and focused. Christ, You are our sufficient, satisfying, sovereign Savior. We have a Redeemer. We are redeemed. Now O Lord, fill our soul with the love of Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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