

The Lord's Table (Part 1)

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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The Old Testament is filled with ceremony, filled with countless ceremonies that the people of God were to embrace and involve themselves in. There were the seven annual festivals, three of which they were supposed to celebrate in Jerusalem. There were some 12 to 13 new moon festivals each year. There were five personal sacrifices, different kinds, that were to be offered at various points throughout the year. There were some 1,200 national sacrifices, ceremonies that were to be performed each year of Israel's existence. So, the Old Testament believer was surrounded by rites and ceremonies; they were constantly a part of his or her life.

This morning I want us to begin to study one of only two ceremonies, or ordinances, that the Lord gave to His church. An ordinance, we use that expression, we use that as opposed to sacrament because of how badly informed the word sacrament has become. But an ordinance is simply a rite or a ceremony that we have been commanded to do. One of those two rites that we have been commanded to do occurs only one time in every believer's life. It's the ordinance of baptism.

The other ceremony is to happen throughout our lives and it's to happen often. And so it must have, for the believer, a huge significance. Christians have been taking the Lord's Table for now almost 2,000 years, but sadly, very few really understand the richness of what the Bible teaches about this powerful remembrance of our Lord and the spiritual benefit that it can be to our souls.

The obvious text that we need to turn to, to, sort of, fill out our understanding of this wonderful ceremony, is 1 Corinthians 11 and I invite you to turn there with me this morning, 1 Corinthians 11. I'll begin reading in verse 17. Ultimately, in our two weeks together, I hope to make it through the entire part of the chapter that begins at verse 17 and runs through the end. This morning I'll just read a portion of it. You follow along as I began reading in verse 17.

But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 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. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 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. 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; 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." 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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Now let me give you the context for what Paul addresses here. Beginning back in chapter 7 verse 1 Paul begins to address issues and answer questions that the leaders in the church in Corinth had raised with him, probably by a letter or by a messenger. Chapter 7 verse 1 says, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote." The first issue he addresses there in chapter 7 is the issue of marriage, singleness and marriage. Then beginning in chapter 8 and running through chapter 11 verse 1 Paul deals with the issue of Christian liberty, another series of questions that had been raised.

Beginning in chapter 11 verse 2 and running through the end of chapter 14 Paul addresses the issue of worship. Specifically, there were several issues related to worship that he felt needed to be addressed and that had been raised with him. There's the appropriate role of men and women in the context of worship. That's the first part of chapter 11, beginning in chapter 11 verse 2, running down through verse 16. When you get to chapter 12 through chapter 14, of course, he deals with the very controversial issue of spiritual gifts and specifically the abuse of the gift of tongues in the church in Corinth.

But between those two issues related to worship, between the role of men and women in worship and the use of spiritual gifts, we find this brief crucial passage about the Lord's Table. Here, Paul is not responding to a question from the church. Instead, he is prompted by something he has heard to address this topic. If you were to look at 1 Corinthians 1:11 you would see that he says, "I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, and that there are quarrels among you." I've heard about something. Chapter 5 verse 1, he makes a similar statement where he mentions, "It is actually reported to me that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as doesn't even exist among the Gentiles."

So, Paul, in this letter, is both dealing with questions they have raised and reports he has heard. Here, when it comes to the issue of the Lord's Table, it's not a question they asked, but rather it is an issue about which he has heard. Notice verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 11, "when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you." In fact, there were flagrant abuses of the Lord's Table. So, in this passage Paul writes to correct problems in the public worship in Corinth related to the Lord's Table.

But as Paul always does, he doesn't simply deal with the abuse, with the excess, he also lays down a, sort of, thoroughgoing framework for understanding this ordinance that our Lord has

given to us. If I could reduce this section to a brief summary it would be this, the Lord's Table is a crucial part of the corporate worship of the church and every individual Christian must understand how we received it, how it is to be celebrated, what it means, and how to rightly prepare for it. Those are the issues that Paul addresses in this paragraph.

Let me give you a, sort of, roadmap of this passage that we will follow as we work our way through it. First of all, in verses 17 to 22, we're going to see the corruption of the Lord's Table that was going on there in Corinth and then in verses 23 to 25, the inception of the Lord's Table, the original institution of the Lord's Table by our Lord Himself. Verses 24 to 26, there's a little bit of overlap here, verses 24 to 26, the implications of the Lord's Table. That is, what is its meaning? What is it about? And then beginning in verse 27 to the end of the chapter, the preparation of the Lord's Table; how do you adequately prepare yourself to take of the Lord's Table?

This morning we're going to begin with just the first couple of those. I want us to begin by looking at the corruption of the Lord's Table. What was going on in Corinth? Notice, Paul begins in verse 17 with this shocking statement, "But in giving this instruction," literally, this command, "I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse." To put that in perspective look back in verse 2 of this same chapter. When Paul begins to deal with the role of men and women in the worship he says, "I praise you because you do remember some of what I communicated to you about this topic." But here, as he transitions to the issue of the Lord's Table in verse 17, he says, when it comes to this issue I have no praise for you whatsoever, in fact, "you come together not for the better but for the worse." Your corporate meeting as a church does not promote your spiritual health, as it should. Instead, it had gotten so bad that their time together was actually a spiritual detriment. It was injuring their souls rather than helping them. What was intended to build them up was tearing them down.

Now, what possibly could be so bad that when the church met, according to Paul, it would have been better if they had just stayed home? Look at verse 18, "For in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you." Literally, by the way, that first expression, "when you come together in assembly," when you gather for corporate worship, "there are divisions." The Greek word for divisions is *schisma*, from which we get the English word schism. The word literally means, "a tear." Something is tearing you apart.

Now, these are not the same divisions he addressed earlier in the first few chapters of this letter. Those divisions were based on personalities, particular leaders they liked, particularly preaching styles they admired more than others; they had made oratory of the first century variety too big an issue among them.

These divisions here are different and we'll see what they are in just a moment, but notice Paul says, "I've heard this report," verse 18, "and in part I believe it." I love that. It just shows us, it's like a window into the Apostle's soul. Think about if you were the Apostle Paul dealing with

the church in Corinth. Wouldn't you say that it's accurate and fair to say that the Corinthians had proven that they were capable of just about anything? So, when he gets a report of what's going on at the Lord's Table he doesn't do what you or I might be tempted to do: Oh, of course, I've just come to expect it. He assumes and believes the very best. He's going to tell us to do that, doesn't he, just a couple chapters later in 1 Corinthians 13 when he says, "Love believes all things." Love believes the best about people and he's confident that surely not everyone he knows in that church is involved in this. Surely it's not quite as bad as has been reported to him.

Verse 19, "For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you." That is a fascinating verse. The word for factions is the Greek word from which we get the word heresy. Its root idea is to make a choice of one party or group over another. And here Paul says, "there must be factions." "There must be." It goes along with the fallen human condition. And while Paul here and other places says that such factions are deplorable and sinful, he says here that God in His wise providence actually uses them for good, "so that those who are approved may become evident."

God allows factions and divisions in the church so that those whom God has tested and approved become obvious. What does that mean? Well, it could mean two things. It could mean that divisions make those who are truly Christians obvious and those who are not truly obvious. It could also mean that divisions make those who are more truly spiritual obvious. I think Paul means both are true. Divisions show the true nature of someone's soul. When they stand for the truth over embracing error and how they stand for the truth against error. Do they do it in the Spirit of Christ, in the Spirit of the gospel? And here, of course, it's not even about that, as we'll see in a moment. These sorts of things reveal the reality of people's hearts.

Now, in verses 20 to 22 Paul goes on to explain explicitly the nature of the divisions that are going on in Corinth. Look at verse 20,

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

Now, we are 2,000 years removed from what was going on in Corinth. This is one of those times when, you know, everybody wants to bring the Bible into our times. You know, what does this mean to me? You cannot answer the question, what does this mean to me, until you answer the question, what did this mean to the people who were reading it in Corinth? You have to, instead of transporting them into our times, to really understand the Bible, you have to transport us back to their times and get a grasp of what was happening there. Only then can you make the bridge into the present. And this is one of those cases. That's very clear.

To fully appreciate what's going on I want to take us back for a moment. I want you to imagine that you're a first century believer in Corinth. The New Testament church and the church in

Corinth gathered on the first day of the week, on Sunday, for corporate worship. They did so in commemoration, as we do, of our Lord's resurrection. In Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered." First Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of every week each of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, and give to the church when you come together so that I don't have to make collections when I come." This is what the church has done from the very beginning. They met on Sunday.

But listen carefully, in the Roman Empire, in the first century, Sunday was not a day off. It was not part of some kind of weekend as it is for us. So, for the Christians, Sunday was always also a work day. It was both a day of worship and it was a day in which they worked and fulfilled their daily responsibilities. So the corporate gathering of the church had to be fit around their other responsibilities.

Now, we don't have a lot of information about how they did that, but we do have a little that's very helpful. Some of the information we have comes from outside the Scripture and some of it comes from within. Let me start by taking you to the source outside the scripture. Pliny the Younger, as he's called, was a Roman official who wrote a series of letters to the Roman Emperor Trajan in about 110 A.D. So, he's a Roman official writing to the Emperor about 110 A.D. This is about 40 years after Paul's death and really only about 15 years after the Apostle John's death and the writing of the final books of the New Testament. So this is very close to the events of the New Testament.

In one of Pliny's letters to Trajan he wrote this about Christians and Christian worship. Listen carefully. "They met on a stated day." Now, we know that day was Sunday, the first day of the week. "Before it was light." That would kind of weed out your church attendance, wouldn't it? "Before it was light and addressed a form of prayer to Christ as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery; never to falsify their word nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up." He goes on. This is again, now a Roman official, who isn't a believer, writing to the Emperor, the Roman Emperor Trajan. So they met in the morning before light, "after which it was their custom to separate," for a normal day of work, "and then reassemble to eat in common a harmless meal."

So, putting a picture together, here's what New Testament worship looked like. They met very early Sunday morning, probably while it was still dark. That makes sense doesn't it? What happened on the first resurrection Sunday? The women went to the tomb when? While it was still dark, before sunrise. And then they had a normal day of work. And then on Sunday night New Testament Christians assembled again for a service. That service began with a meal.

By the way, can I just say that their weekly routine and commitment to corporate worship should convict all of us for how lazy and soft we can be about making the gathering of the church a priority for ourselves and our families. Most of us, not all of us, but most of us, have the day off

and it's still hard, right? Think about those New Testament believers, up while it's still dark, gathering to worship their Lord, then going for a full day's work, and then when the day of work is done, assembling again as the church.

Now, that's where the Scripture picks up. Turn with me to Acts 20 because we have a little more description about that evening meeting on the Lord's Day. Acts 20 7, "On the first day of the week," Sunday, "when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight." Relax, I'm not taking any biblical warrant from that text to do the same. This is a special occasion. He's not going to see them again and so he wants to get everything out that he has to say first. Verse 8, "There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together."

There's one of the clearest New Testament pictures of what first century worship looked like. They're meeting in an upper room, the large area in one of the wealthier member's houses and they're there in the evening, and notice that they met in the evening to "break bread." That expression, "breaking bread," is probably a general expression for a meal, but not just any meal, a meal that was closed by a celebration of the Lord's Table.

They did that because the very first Lord's Supper was a full meal, the Passover meal accompanied by this new ordinance; the Last Supper with the Lord's Supper. That common meal then, when they came together in the evening, that common meal followed by the Lord's Supper at the very end of it, was then followed by a message from the Word of God. I'm sure there was singing (we know that from other places in the New Testament, it's not mentioned here) and the other issues of worship that are included throughout the New Testament.

So, that's the background. That Sunday night meal came to be called a love feast. In fact, Jude refers to it as he even deals with false teachers. In Jude 1:12, he says, "These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts." That's a reference to that meal on Sunday night when they shared in common a meal and then at the end of it took the Lord's Table together and then the other aspects of their worship.

So what was going on in Corinth? If that's, sort of, the basic structure of the Lord's Day for the first century believers, what was going on in Corinth? Go back to 1 Corinthians 11:20, "when you meet together, you think you're celebrating the Lord's Table, but it's not." Paul says, don't even call it that. It's become something completely different. Verse 21,

for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? 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.

Now, what was going on then in the church in Corinth was a division, but not a division based on theology. It was a division based on economics and socioeconomic status. As we discovered, even from Acts, there were no church buildings in the first century. Instead, the churches met in homes and to accommodate the entire church it tended to meet in larger, wealthier, homes. So, as you were able to finish your work on Sunday you would have headed to the large home of one of the wealthier members of the church.

And in Corinth, when you arrived at that home, tragically you would have discovered there were significant differences in how the Christians who attended were treated. First, there were differences in terms of when you would even be able to arrive for this love feast, for this meal, for the breaking of bread. The wealthy, as today, are more in control of their own schedules than the poorer working classes. So they were the first to arrive, taking the best seats, and they began eating sooner, and they didn't wait for the rest of their brothers. Look down in verse 33, or verse 21 rather. Verse 21, "each one takes his own supper first." Verse 33, "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." That was the first thing you would have noted. When you arrived, if you were one of the common laborers and not under your own control, you left when your master, when your boss said you could leave, and you got there and found the party was already going and in full swing without you. Nobody waited.

Secondly, you would have found there were significant differences in terms of where different Christians would be seated for the meal. I had the opportunity a number of years ago to visit the ruins of ancient Corinth. Archaeologists have excavated several large homes from the Roman era there in Corinth. In each of those homes there is a well-decorated dining room. The Romans called it the *triclinium*. In the largest of the homes they found there in Corinth there is a dining room that would have seated, in the normal way where they laid their bodies out around tables, only about 10 people or so, but seated, more in the way we would do it, which was occasionally done in Rome where there was a shortage of space, it could have accommodated somewhere between 15 to 20 people, somewhere, a maximum of about 15 or 20 people.

So guess what? If you arrived early, you sat in the dining room. If you arrived late, there was no more room in the dining room so you sat in the open courtyard in the center of the house, a sort of rugged dining alfresco. Who was able to get to the house first? The wealthy, not the slaves, not the servants, not the artisans, and so, not only was there a difference in when you were able to arrive, but because of that there was a difference in where you were seated.

But there was another difference you would have found if you had shown up at the church in Corinth. The third difference was in quantity and quality of the food you ate. Notice verse 21, "each one provides his own supper." You see, the love feasts in the first century were kind of like Christian potlucks. What you ate, but it wasn't where they shared everything, it wasn't like you came and you put your little meager dish there and somebody else had put a really nice, you know, fried chicken and, you know, you put down your little arugula or whatever, it wasn't like

that, and then you got to eat some of everything. Instead, what you brought, you ate. So, what you ate depended on what you were able to personally afford.

So, in the dining room the wealthy were having steak and lobster and they were going through the wine as well, good wine, until some of them were even getting drunk. And out in the courtyard, others were having a very small meager meal. In fact, verse 22 says some had, what? “Nothing.” So verse 21 says, they went hungry. When it was all done they were still hungry. So there were those who had more than enough and those who had nothing. How amazing, a meal intended to picture the love of Christ for His Church and the love of Christ’s people for one another, and instead it had come to symbolize the differences between them and be a source of division.

When the meal was over and they came to celebrate the Lord’s Table, one Christian was still hungry, on the outside as it were, and another was completely satiated and even bordering on drunk. Verse 22, “What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?” Listen, the corporate worship is not about throwing a party for your friends. There’s a time and a place for that. Do it at your house and sometime other than when the church is meeting.

Verse 22 goes on to say, “Or do you despise the church of God, are you going to shame those who have nothing?” Are you really going to do that? Paul says. “What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.” It’s really amazing. You know, as I look at what was going on in Corinth, obviously our circumstances here are different, we don’t have love feasts and when we have potlucks we all share of one another’s food, but I started asking myself, what are some of the ways we can be guilty of some of the same things? What are some of the lessons that come out of what was going on in Corinth?

I think, first of all, it’s an important reminder for those whom God has blessed with material wealth to be quick to be generous with other needy Christians in the church. This matters to God. It’s not yours. He gave it to you; He can take it away in a moment. Be generous. Paul urges that on all those who have means. In 1 Timothy 6 he says, don’t put your trust in those things and “be generous, eager to share.”

I think it’s also a reminder, and this matters whether you have wealth or don’t, if your relationship with others in the church isn’t right then God isn’t happy with your most sincere acts of worship and service. They thought they were meeting to take the Lord’s Table. They thought they were meeting to honor their Lord, and the Lord, through Paul, says, I don’t think so. It’s not the Lord’s Supper. You may think it is. You may have that in your heart, an intention, that may be sincerely what you think you’re doing, but it’s not to Me. Let me ask you this morning as you sit here, is there somebody in this church with whom there’s unresolved conflict, with whom there are issues?

There's another lesson that comes out of this and that is, your love for others is a test of the genuineness of your faith. There were probably some of these Christians, professed Christians, in Corinth, who weren't believers at all, because the Apostle John makes it clear in 1 John 2. He writes,

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and he does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Listen, if you don't love people, God's people, then you're not a Christian.

So, that was the situation in Corinth. That was the background of what's going on here and that prompts Paul to step back and remind them of what the Lord's Table is truly all about. So that's the corruption of the Lord's Table.

Paul takes us, secondly, to the inception of the Lord's Table, the institution of the Lord's Table. Verse 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." Now, this same event that Paul's about to unfold for us here is recorded in four places in the New Testament, here in 1 Corinthians 11, in Matthew's Gospel chapter 26, in Mark's Gospel chapter 14, and in Luke's Gospel chapter 22. All four of those accounts are very similar with only very slight nuances in difference, but this one here in 1 Corinthians is unique among them because it is the first of those four books, probably, to be written.

It was probably written, this book, around 54 to 55 A.D. while Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. So, although the church of Jesus Christ had celebrated the Lord's Table since Pentecost back in 30 A.D., this was the first time that our Lord had formally passed down in writing, through his apostles, what it was all about. This is roughly some 25 years later.

As the practice of this had continued to spread through the teaching of the apostles, the details and the background had, sort of, gradually begun to get a little sketchy. So, Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, writes out the first inspired version of what happened that night. But how did he know? Paul is an apostle, but he wasn't there. He tells us in verse 23, "For I received from the Lord." Paul means that he received, he probably means, that he received direct instruction from the Lord Himself.

Turn over to Galatians. You remember this passage in Galatians 1. Paul talks about how he came to know all that he knew and in Galatians 1:11,

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which is preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Himself taught me. You say, when and how did that happen? Well, he goes on to explain it down in verse 15,

But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. And then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with the apostles.

He sat under the tutelage of Christ Himself, direct instruction.

But at the same time, both Acts and Galatians assert that the other handpicked apostles all affirmed that Paul was truly an apostle with the right to speak for Christ. Look at Galatians 2:9, "James and Peter and John recognize the grace that had been given to me and they said, yes, you're called to go to the Gentiles by our Lord, we to the Jewish people." So, it wasn't that Paul just set himself out and said I had this revelation, like some Joseph Smith sort of character. No, he was affirmed by those men who had been with our Lord, handpicked by our Lord, as being an actual apostle. And he said, I got this by direct revelation.

Verse 23, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you." What Paul had received directly from the risen Christ, he had already taught to the Corinthians. When? Well, he was with them for some 18 months several years before, serving as their pastor, and he taught them then, but now he rehearses it again to them and he puts it in writing for our benefit as well. Verse 23, here's what I delivered to you, "that the Lord Jesus in the night He was betrayed." In other words, he says, the roots of this ordinance, this ceremony that we've been commanded to keep, this ordinance, was instituted on the night before our Lord's death. Now, Paul doesn't tell us here, but the other three accounts tell us that Jesus did so as part of the Passover celebration.

So, let me just briefly take you through that. On Thursday of the Passion Week Jesus sent two disciples, Peter and John, off to prepare for them to partake of the Passover meal together. He did so so that Judas wouldn't know where they were going, so that he couldn't come that night until after the Last Supper was over. But Peter and John went. They found the man who had prepared an upper room. They found all things already set.

Some time that Thursday afternoon after three o'clock, Peter and John would have taken the lamb that had been selected days before to the Temple. There they would have stood in line with perhaps hundreds of thousands of other worshippers, waiting for the time when they would come

to the front, they would lay their own hands on that lamb, and then either Peter or John would have taken the knife and slit that lamb's throat. A priest would have been there to catch the blood in a bowl. He would have immediately taken that blood and dashed it against the foot of the altar. Parts of the animal then would have been skinned and the necessary parts put on the altar to burn. The lamb then would have been given back to Peter and John to take back to the place of the upper room, where they would have roasted the lamb in a clay oven on a skewer of pomegranate wood. After dark Jesus and the other disciples came to the upper room.

The basic order of events of what happened for that Passover meal have remained essentially unchanged for thousands of years. It was a simple meal to commemorate God's redemption of the nation from Egypt. He killed, you remember, the firstborn son of every Egyptian household, but he spared the firstborn son of all of those who had applied the Passover lamb's blood to the doorposts. That's why it was called Passover; He passed over those houses and let the firstborn sons live.

There were six basic foods that were a part of this meal. There was lamb, that was obviously the center point of the meal. There were bitter herbs that were to remind them symbolically of the bitterness of the slavery they endured there. There was unleavened bread to remind them they had to get out in a hurry, no time to put yeast, or for time for the bread to rise. There was charoset, which is a mixture of nuts and fruit and wine, a little salad of sorts. There was a raw vegetable that was dipped in a, sort of, tart sauce and finally, there was wine. Those six elements.

And here's what happened, verse 23,

the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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."

Now, Matthew tells us in his account, Jesus did this while they were eating. So, while they were eating the lamb, during the main part of the meal, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread that was there on the table. He gave thanks for it. By the way, the Greek word for "give thanks" is *eucharisteo*. That's why some, particularly Catholics, call the Lord's Table, the Eucharist, after the Greek word *eucharisteo*, to give thanks. Then He broke it, after He gave thanks, and then He explained what it meant, which we'll look at together our next time.

But notice verse 25, "In the same way He took the cup also after supper." Wine mixed with water, the rabbis tell us, was an integral part of the Passover celebration. By the time Jesus and His disciples ate this Passover in the year 30 A.D. there were a prescribed number of times that you drank from your cup of wine. Actually, it was probably a single cup that was passed around and shared. Some churches still do that; I've been in services where they have a common communion cup from which they drink. But there were a prescribed number of times. You were

to drink from the cup four times. That corresponded to four promises that God had made His people when they were slaves in Egypt.

Turn back to Exodus 6. This is important to understand because it builds the imagery of what Jesus is doing here. Exodus 6, here's what the rabbis had taught and what was practiced in the time of Jesus. In Exodus 6:6 our Lord sends Moses, and I do believe that the one interacting with Moses and the children of Israel was the second member of the Trinity, our Lord Himself, and He says,

“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians, I will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.’”

Now, in those verses there are four promises. Promise number one, “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” That was the first cup of wine. That promise was read, the cup was served and enjoyed together. Promise number two, “I will deliver you from their bondage.” Again, the second cup that would have been shared. The third cup, “I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.” And then finally the fourth promise, “Then I will take you for my people and I will be your God.”

It was the third cup that Jesus would have taken at that point in the meal. It was called the cup of blessing. You can see it called that even in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Or, it was also called the cup of redemption. It was the cup where God promised to redeem His people. Jesus takes that third cup, the promise of redemption, verse 25, back in now 1 Corinthians 11, verse 25 says, “In the same way *He* took that third cup after supper,” that's how we know it was the third cup, “saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.’”

Now, again, next time we'll look at what this cup means, but I don't want you to miss the big picture of what Jesus is doing here. He took two parts of the Passover celebration, the reminder of the physical redemption of God's people from physical slavery, He took two parts of that celebration, and He turned them, He turned them into an entirely different kind of remembrance. Now those two elements are to remind His disciples of their spiritual rescue from the slavery of sin and God's wrath. It was all intentional, all carefully measured. Every part of it was a fulfillment of what that all was about in the Old Testament. Listen, the Passover wasn't just a nice way to remember Jesus. The Passover was, in eternity past, a lesson about Jesus.

Now, it's important to understand that this was not something that only the 11 disciples were to do that night. Judas had already left at this point. This is intended for all Christians for all of human history. How do we know that? Well, notice twice our Lord gives a command for this to

be done. Verse 24, “do this in remembrance of Me.” Verse 25, “do this in remembrance of Me.” The tense of both of those Greek verbs is in the present tense. It speaks of an ongoing practice, be continually doing this in remembrance of me. But, sort of, the hammer blow that ends all discussion comes in verse 26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death.” When? “Until He comes.” This is to be the practice of the church to be continually remembering Me until I return. So clearly then, the Lord’s Table is an ordinance. It is a ceremony we have been commanded to do.

How are we to keep it? Well, just a couple of other details in this passage, sort of, fill out the institution of this ordinance. What about when? When are we to do it? Notice verse 17, “when you come together.” Verse 18, “when you come together.” Verse 20, “when you come together.” Verse 33, “when you come together.” Clearly, the Lord’s Table is not intended to be a private expression of worship. While it’s not completely prohibited here, certainly that’s implied in this and other places in the New Testament. You don’t find believers privately taking of the Lord’s Table together. Why? Because of what it means, which will see our next time together.

What about how frequently? How often should we do this? And nowhere does the Scripture prescribe how often. The closest our Lord gets is in verse 25, “as often as you drink.” This implies that we will do it often, until He comes. In the New Testament church this was so important, this ceremony, that initially after Pentecost it was every day. In Acts 2:46, “Day by day they continued breaking bread from house to house.” But by the time 20 years had passed, and you come to the more mature churches in the New Testament, the church was celebrating it on the Lord’s Day when they came together. You see that here in 1 Corinthians 11, you see it in Acts 20. So that became the practice.

Eventually, of course, if I could fast forward into church history, eventually during the Middle Ages the Lord’s Table grew into the perversion of the Roman Catholic Mass and its meaning was eclipsed and perverted. We’ll talk a little bit about that next time, but with the Reformation the church again began to celebrate the biblical ordinance. And when they did the frequency varied. For some it was every week. John Calvin taught it could be celebrated every week, but chose instead to celebrate it less often, about once a month, because he felt there was a temptation for it to become too familiar and to lose it’s importance. The Swiss reformer Zwingli called for observing it quarterly and the same sort of variations in how often continue to today. Each group of elders are responsible to make that decision. In our church it’s once a month. So, there’s the institution, a command, an ordinance given to the church. This is a ceremony, you believer, are commanded to be a part of by Christ Himself.

Now, next time we want to examine what the two elements mean. But I want to finish our time this morning by making sure that you don’t miss the forest for the trees. What is this all about? What is the big idea behind the Lord’s Table? Well, you get the big idea by looking at the three

names Paul uses here in 1 Corinthians to identify the ceremony. Look back in chapter 10 verse 21, talking here about believers going to the idol temples and then wanting to come and worship Christ, he says, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake,” watch this, “the table of the Lord.” “The table of the Lord,” the table that belongs to the Lord. Look over in chapter 11 verse 20, “When you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.” The Greek word for Lord’s there is crystal clear. It’s a word that speaks of ownership, possession. This is the supper that belongs to the Lord. It is a dinner, that’s the Greek word, it was the night main meal. It is a dinner at which Christ Himself is the host. That’s the point. It is the Lord’s Table. He’s the host. We’re His guests.

Now, one other expression rounds this out. Go back to chapter 10 and look at verse 20, “No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; I do not want you to become sharers in demons.” He says, if you’re involved in eating the food there at the idol temple it’s like you’re in communion with the demons. The word is *koinonia*, in fellowship, you’re in communion with the demons. Now, what does that mean? It means the opposite is true. Whenever we take of the Lord’s Table, it’s His table. He’s the host. Paul calls what we drink here, “the cup of the Lord.” It’s as if we were enjoying a meal together with Christ Himself at His table. And here’s the good news. It’s just a promise that someday we will. It’s kind of hard to be real fulfilled with a little piece of cracker and a little swig of grape juice. But understand this, it’s a promise by Christ that someday He will sit down with you and with me and have a meal together.

Go back to Matthew’s Gospel. I close with this, Matthew 26:29. Matthew 26:29, after He’d instituted the Lord’s Supper, verse 29, “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you,” underline those words, “with you in My Father’s kingdom.” Jesus refused to drink the fourth cup. You remember the promise that the fourth cup related to back in Exodus 6? “Then I will take you for My people and I will be your God.” Jesus said, I’m going to wait to drink it until I really sit down with you in the future and we have a meal together.

Every time you and I partake of the Lord’s Table it’s His table. It’s as if we were having a meal with Him. But it’s wonderful; it’s beautiful. We’ll talk about it’s meaning, it’s more than we could ever imagine, but it’s also not as completely fulfilling as it would be, is it? To actually sit down with Christ across the table and literally, physically, have a meal with Him? When we do it it’s a promise that that too will come. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for Your truth. Thank You for this passage that was borne out of trouble in Corinth and yet has become so rich to our hearts. Help us to think on these things, help us to meditate Father, on all that You want us to learn.

But Father, most of all, remind us that our Lord has given us this ceremony. He's commanded us to do it for our spiritual good and as a wonderful promise that someday we will literally sit down and have a meal together in His presence.

Father, we thank You and bless You that He is alive, that He is real, that just as we will share lunch with someone today, some day we will share lunch with our Lord. Until that day, keep us faithful.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who doesn't love Jesus Christ, who doesn't long to be with Him, perhaps who claims to be a Christian, made some profession, prayed some prayer, walked some aisle, was confirmed or christened or something else, but Father, who doesn't love Christ like that. Father, remind them that it's only those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love who experience His grace, not because we earn it or merit it, but because that is the expression of hearts that love Him. Thank You Father. And I pray for that individual that he or she would come to know the true love of Christ today; they would turn in repentance and faith and embrace Him as Lord and Savior. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.