

Maundy Thursday in Biblical Perspective
“Benefitting from the Lord’s Supper”
John 13:34–35, I Corinthians 11:16–34
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For our focus in coming to the Communion Table I’d like to start by reading from John 13. We will be reading from I Corinthians 11 when we get to our time of confession right before we partake at the Table. John 13:34–35 says [34] *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* [35] *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I don’t think I will have a moment in my life in which a king, queen or a president will send word to me to show up for a command performance. That is quite an honor that an artist or someone gets whereby those in power and authority give a direction to come for a command performance. They would say something like ‘Come, for I have need for you to appear in my presence to do what I have called you to do.’ On second thought, that is true of me and it is true of all of you that know Christ as Lord and Savior. Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper each and every time is a command performance. Our King has commanded our presence. He has outlined our performance. We appear before Him to engage and embrace that which He has commanded us to do.

That is why in Holy Week of every year we remind ourselves of this by the very title. We celebrate on Holy Week the remembrance of our Lord instituting this Supper and we call that night Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from a Latin word that in its root means ‘command.’ We also get another word which is ‘mandate’ from that root word. This is a mandated presence. Our Lord mandated the Lord’s Supper. He called us to it. Now every time we do it we don’t call it Maundy Thursday but during Holy Week this is to remind us that it is a command performance because our Lord commanded it.

What does it mean that this is commanded? When you come to the Lord’s Supper remember the King has commanded our engagement and there are three dynamics of it being a command. The first one is that the Lord’s Supper is now a command to be celebrated in the life and ministry of the church. Our Lord doesn’t tell us how often to do it. He just says ‘for as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup...’ Some churches decide that this means to do it every Sunday and others decide to do it periodically.

Here at Briarwood we have aligned ourselves in Communion with our history of the Reformation practice, specifically the Presbyterians themselves. We would have it often and have the whole service to bear upon it so that it wasn’t just something that was tacked onto to the end of every service but a special service and a Communion season whereby we prepared for the focus of the Lord’s Supper in that worship service, surrounded by preaching and singing that highlighted the Table. We do this so that it is designed around I Corinthians 11 where it says “I want you to come together for the better and not for the worse.” This is a time for us to embrace it and know that it is here for our benefit as we come, not worthy personally, but in a manner worthy of the Lord. So we do the Lord’s Supper as it is commanded as a blessing from the Lord in our walk with the Lord. He has provided it as a means of growth in our life so in that sense it is a command.

In other words, we didn't invent this and no church that is committed to Christ can dismiss the Lord's Supper. It is to be a part of the life and ministry of the church as a command of the Lord. Our Lord says 'if you love Me you will keep My commands' and this is a commandment. The old meal was the Passover. It was a bloody meal and it pointed to Christ our Passover Lamb. This New Covenant meal is a bloodless meal. We make no sacrifices here for we are remembering the Sacrifice once and for all, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but this is not our last meal. This is all leading to the meal of the millennial glory in the presence of the Lord and that is the Feast of the Lamb when we will eat it with Him present. Now we eat it to remember Him but we will eat that meal with Him and all who belong to Him.

The second way this is a command performance is the way we do it – the practices of the Lord's Supper. We don't do this by accident for we are called to come in a manner worthy therefore we have a season of preparation. We always announce when we are going to do the Lord's Supper so that you can properly prepare to come to it. That is part of the command. Secondly, we come with a specific theological focus that we are to examine ourselves and confess our sins. We are to focus on Christ and what He has done because that is the foundation of our salvation and not our works for the Lord but the Lord's work for us on the cross as He paid for our sins.

Also it has to do with the very things you do in taking Communion. You will come to the Table, be given the bread and you will partake of the bread. Then an elder will come behind and give you the fruit of the vine that the Lord set aside in remembrance of His shed blood. The bread represents His body and the fruit of the vine represents His blood. Our elders will give those elements to you separately as we come to the Table. This is not a critique but we don't dip it because there were two commands. Command number one is 'take and eat' and then distinct from that is command number two which is 'take and drink' and we follow His commands as we come in a manner worthy and prepared following His performance.

Thirdly, this is part of the command that is given with a promise. In this Supper He brings before our mind that we recommit ourselves not only to rest in Him but to love one another. He says 'A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. By this love all men will know that you are My disciples.' What a glorious promise that there is something He has given to us that is embedded in the Lord's Supper and a call to love one another as He has loved us. He says that will heighten your effective witness in this world. It is your love for one another that is patterned after My love for you that becomes an instrument whereby men and women will know that you are My disciples.

I live in an age where I want people to know that I'm with Jesus and that I'm following Jesus. Lord, what ways have You given me that people can know that I am a Christ follower? I have put my trust in Jesus because I'm helpless and hopeless and I've heard the Good News that God has sent the Helper, His Son my Redeemer. God is a sure Hope to the hopeless and that's the Blessed Hope, Jesus Christ Himself. I want people to know that they need Him and that I have put my trust in Him even as I would want to tell them. One way they can know is that I can tell them but another way they can know is by how I love you and how you and I love each other.

Loving one another is not a new commandment. Jesus says a new commandment I give to you that you love one another but that's not a new commandment. That is filled in the Old Testament. What makes it new is this side of the cross. John 13:34 says [34] *A new*

commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you... The bold is the new part. The newness is that we love the way He has loved us.

So how has He loved us? I'm going to enumerate five ways and you and I by God's grace can live them out. These five ways mark out a Christ-like love for one another. Number one is that it is a sacrificial love. He loved us by laying down His life for us and that's how we ought to love one another – sacrificially. It is that we actually give sacrificially to one another in that very special, reciprocal, redemptive relationship that God's people ought to know with each other. As the world watches it they see us love one another as Christ loved us and the very foremost thing is an agape love which is a sacrificial love. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved His wife, His bride, the church and gave Himself for her. This sacrificial love attracts unbelievers to Christ as Christ followers.

Secondly, it is a selfless love. It's a love that does not seek its own. It's a love that simply doesn't pay back love that has been given to us but it is a love that is sacrificially delivered for simply the purpose of loving the person that needs to be loved. This is not because it expects to be paid back but it is a selfless love. The reason this love is patient, kind and gentle is because it does not seek its own.

Thirdly, it is a saving love. It doesn't mean I can lay down my life to save people. I can't do that and my love cannot redeem people but my love can give people a taste of the Redeemer. When we love one another and we see others caught in sin we are trying to point people to the redeeming power of Christ. We want them through our love to know the One who has first loved us and that is Christ. We want people to be saved and delivered from their sins so when we love them sacrificially and selflessly it is that they might know the saving love of Jesus Christ and that is a glorious love! It is a love that is desperately needed by all but it is a love they will not receive unless the Lord gives them eyes to see and ears to hear. One of the things the Lord uses in the power of the Spirit of God to draw people to Christ is the love of His people sacrificially, selflessly given that is pointing them to the Savior and not to themselves.

Number four is that this is a supernatural love. Our love ought to be inexplicable. I love that in the book of Acts as God's people begin to serve the Lord it describes their relationship as one that even though the property they had belonged to them no one counted it as their own. Ultimately they were just stewards of it and not owners of it for it belonged to the Lord. Then they willingly sold their property to give to one another. This is described three different times in the opening chapters of Acts in various ways and the comments from the people is that they marveled at how much they loved one another. There was something beyond the love that they saw in the world. This was a love of intensity and intentionality. This was a love of commitment that was beyond what they would see in natural relationships. This was a love that was overwhelming and glorious.

I have to be honest as a pastor. I want this love to go to another level in this church that has never been known but I also need to say that I stand amazed at the depth, breadth, heights, and the width of the love I see in this congregation and I'm grateful for it. This is not a pastor that has to go to the whip to get his people to love because I am overwhelmed at what I already see in this congregation. I'm hesitant to say this because I don't want to blunt any conviction that you might have that you need to love more. I want you to sense that but I have to be honest that I have seen it. I have experienced recently in my surgery process and I've seen it in one another.

Recently this past Thursday a parent of a member of this church requested an anointing by the elders. The parent is not a member. And on a Thursday afternoon I am standing in a

hospital room with eight elders just from one congregational community and I see their love for someone that they don't even know but for whom one of the body of Christ was deeply hurting as they considered the needs of their parents. That is a blessing to see that kind of love from under shepherds, deacons, staff and day to day everyday members. So I'm not saying this because of any need to say it, except for the faithfulness to God's Word to excel still more. Love divine all love's excelling but excel still more. Ask God to give us a love that is inexplicable except Christ Himself is enabling us to do it.

One of the reasons this is a new commandment is because we can do this by the power of the Spirit of God. What is the fruit of the Spirit? It is love that is demonstrated with joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What is the aim of God's Word in our preaching? It is love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sound mind. The Word of God and the Spirit of God gives us a love from the risen Savior that is inexplicable because He has poured forth His Spirit and given us His Word. This is new that you have the same Spirit within you that was within Christ all the way from His birth to His cross to His tomb and from His tomb to glory. Then from glory that same Spirit of Christ has been poured into you. That's what makes our love for one another new. That same Spirit of Christ enables us to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Fifthly and finally, a love that is a Christ-like love is a significant love. It actually gets the attention of people. It is something that bears witness for Christ. This will penetrate to the rich segment of society and the poor segment of society. It will penetrate every ethnic segment of society, every nation and every strata of society. John 13:35 says *[35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* The word 'all' here means all kinds of people will know that you are My disciples when you love one another, as I have loved you.

So come to the Table for I'm not just inviting but on behalf of Jesus I'm commanding – Maundy Thursday – it's His mandate. We don't come asking what the fare will be at this Table for we know what it is. It is the bread and the fruit of the vine and we will take of them individually and rejoice in their blessing as they unite as the testimony of our Redeemer. Another commandment He gives before He even gave them this meal in John 13 is He first washed their feet and then was betrayed as Judas Iscariot left. Then He said 'A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you for by this all kinds of men will know, not you or even your church, but they will know you are Mine, My disciples. The attention from this love will not go to you but will go to Me and when men see My love in you then they can know My love forever.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the glorious blessing of this Table that You have commanded us to come and to partake in and from. We thank You Father for we rejoice in it so we come. We come Father, because You commanded us and we love You therefore we want to do what You have commanded and You have commanded us how to do it with the bread and the fruit of the vine so we come to the Table to partake. You have told us and commanded us to examine ourselves to remind ourselves that we are who we are because of Your blood and the fact that You bore our sins in Your body and we may be who we are because of Your Spirit who is within us until You come again for us. Now Father, allow us in this meal to renew our desire to grow our desire to excel still more in loving one another as You have loved us – sacrificially, selflessly, savingly,

supernaturally, significantly – that others may know we are disciples of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus who is our Savior. Hallelujah, what a Savior, Amen!