

Advent in Biblical Perspective
“Until”

I Corinthians 11:23-26

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December 24, 2022 • Christmas Eve Sermon – 11pm

Before we get to I Corinthians 11 I want to give you a little bit of the background in the setting of trying to connect the birth of Christ to taking communion which is part of our 11 p.m. service on Christmas Eve. I want to start this setting by reading from Luke 2:8-20 which says *[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,*

[14] “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

In the midst of everything that took place, and what was coming to fruition, can you even imagine what that young lady, Mary was wrestling with after what the angel had said to her? What did she do? She paused. The shepherds come running in. They talk about angels declaring and Mary would have believed for she was visited by an angel. They come in haste. They're excited. They're going to go tell everybody what just happened about what they were told about this Child, but Mary paused and treasured up all these things in her heart as she pondered them.

Wouldn't it be great if someone could treasure up and ponder for you? If someone could vote for me, I'd vote Harry Reeder. Talk about some depth of pondering. I want him to do my pondering but he can't do my pondering. He's tried on many occasions to do my pondering, but he can't do my pondering. No one can treasure up for me. In other words, to give the appropriate value to something to treasure it up in our hearts, we can't do that, but in this study, I will point out a handful of things to let you treasure and ponder that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide you through this. This being, this I Corinthians passage.

I Corinthians 11 explains to us what we do when we come to this Table. I Corinthians 11:17-22 says *[17] But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, [19] for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you*

may be recognized. [20] When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. [21] For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. [22] What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

In other words, he is telling them they are doing communion wrong. Basically, he gives some examples of what they're doing wrong, but fundamental what he's saying is the way they are acting, partaking and living around communion is not a reflection of what communion is. They are contradicting the very thing they gather to do. They are contradicting it in the way that they relate one to another. Let's continue in the passage.

I Corinthians 11:23-26 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.*

Paul could have gone through and corrected them on every single little thing that they were doing wrong, but instead he showed them the real, genuine thing. Even though they were violating the function and the action of communion, Paul was clearly getting at the real problem and it was a problem with their heart. They were violating the directives that God had given them of what they were to do during the until. There are many 'untils' in Scripture and they are seen throughout Scripture, until the Messiah comes, until the flood comes, until the last person of this generation dies out.

The first great until was answered in the birth of our Savior – until the Messiah comes, the One who had come to save His people from their sins. But we live in the last great until, for the until that we live in ends with Him coming again. Paul say 'you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.' At Christmas there was a statement that my dad wrote on my packages that later became a sticker you can actually buy. It said 'do not open until Christmas.' He wrote that on my presents and unfortunately it wasn't written on any of my siblings presents, but there's a reason for that too. I knew what the punishment was for opening a present before Christmas Day and the punishment for repeating that offense. If I repeated that offense another child in the city got that present and you were happy about it. It's not a pretty thing.

So the 'until' of Christmas is, you know, that December 25th is coming. So all you got to do is wait until that day. 'Can't you just make it until that day?' That is the speech that I would get on a regular occasion every year for quite some time. We get the calendar out, we look at it, it's coming, but this 'until' that we're living in now, we don't know the day or hour. If we did pick a date, we'd be wrong because no one knows the date, not even the Son (Matthew 24:36). We do know what's going to happen, we just don't know when. So how do we live during the until? What does Scripture say for us to live during the until?

I'm going to give you five perspective P's on this. I'm going to let you treasure and ponder each one. I don't know which ones the Lord will use in your heart. I just know which ones He has used in mine – all five of them. All five. The first perspective P in how we live in the until is patience. James declared patience when he said in James 5:7-8, *[7] Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. [8] You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

Fix your heart on the right things. Seek first the Kingdom of God. At Christmas, we read the Christmas story. We find a couple of people that had established hearts in the midst of unknowns that will blow your mind. For example, Joseph's heart was established. How do we know that Joseph had an established heart? Because when he was told what had happened to Mary, when he was told what his role was going to be, he obeyed immediately. I think Joseph was put in a category where when the Lord gave you a message it was pretty much guaranteed that no one was going to believe you. When you walk away, almost everyone you talk to is going to think you're lying to them, but he was telling the truth because God told him what was unfolding.

Mary certainly had an established heart. After the angel told Mary what would happen to her, Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me. According to Your Word.' That is an established heart. That's someone who has fixed their minds on the things of the Lord, no matter what the circumstances, no matter the shame, no matter what takes place. Ponder on that for just a minute. Do you think that Mary understood when she said, 'let it be to me, according to Your Word,' that she was speaking about something far more than having a child being a virgin? I don't. I think that was so far beyond her, she could barely grasp it but she still said 'let it be done according to Your Word.' She didn't know that her other children would reject Him. She also didn't know that the town they were from weren't going to welcome Him as what He is. She didn't know that some would love Him and others would despicably hate Him. She didn't know He was going to be crucified. She didn't know she would bury Him and anoint Him. She didn't know He would rise from the dead. She didn't know all that but her heart was established. Therefore, she could be patient with the Lord.

Every time we finally, in obedience to the Lord, say, 'I am your servant, and in this particular situation, let it be done to me according to Your Word,' there will always be another situation because that is simply preparation for that which is yet to come. So first of all, we wait with patience. As James points out the farmer waits patiently for those things to happen that he can't control. Right? It didn't he didn't say as the farmer waits patiently and does all this work to make the plant grow. No, as the farmer waits patiently for the rains to come, because he can't make that happen. How do we establish our hearts? We seek first the Kingdom of God, which leads to our second perspective.

The second perspective P in how we live in the until is pilgrim. We are pilgrims. Jesus Himself was a pilgrim, for this world was not His home. This is not our home. We're not citizens of this earth. We're sojourners. We're here temporarily. We're passing through. Our citizenship is in heaven. You can always tell how long someone's planning to stay by how much luggage they bring. So, some of you may have out-of-town guests for Christmas. If they came in with six suitcases, they won't be leaving the day after Christmas. They're staying a while. You can look at what they have, what they hold on to, look at all their stuff. That's how we can get caught up in the world. We can get caught up in the world making this our home and we lose perspective of when we do that. We have to maintain that perspective. Jesus was born in a borrowed stable. Jesus declared that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head. Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb. This is not His home. He never set up citizenship here. He came and did what God called Him to do, and He returned to the Father. He called us unto Himself and said, 'Don't, don't get attached to this world because you belong in heaven with Me.

How do you see yourself at Christmas? Do you see yourself this Christmas as a citizen and a resident of this earth, celebrating God coming down to our home? In other words, in your mind, do you think that Emmanuel means God came to our home? No, that's not our

perspective as a believer. As a believer, we're the guest. We're visiting here and Jesus came down to take us home. We will celebrate His birth because we're excited that He will take us home one day. If we don't have that perspective that we are a pilgrim, then we love the world and the things of the world, where we latch on to what is on earth and don't submit and surrender ourselves to the Lordship of Christ. What do we do as we wait patiently as pilgrims while we're here?

This leads to the third perspective P as to how we live in the until and the verse declares to us; we proclaim to the world the Lord's death until He comes. So the third P is proclaim. I think there's two sides of this proclamation. If it's in the context of communion, then we must be proclaiming the Lord's Death to ourselves and to the Church. As we come and partake of communion together, then we partake as brothers and sisters in Christ, we're proclaiming the Lord's Death to ourselves individually and you are proclaiming the Lord's death in the fellowship of believers. We need to do that amongst ourselves to recalibrate us, but we also proclaim the Lord's death until it comes to the outside world. We proclaim to them as we want them to forfeit their citizenship of earth, and we want them to become pilgrims along with us. So we come in a perspective of celebrating communion. We come as pilgrims, we come as sojourners, we come as those who are never intending to latch on to this particular place and we want as many people as possible to become pilgrims with us. We want them to experience what we experience.

So, by God's grace, He declares to us that our proclaiming actually hastens the day of the Lord. I'm not exactly sure how that works, except I know that the proclamation of the Gospel has got to go to the ends of the earth and the Lord's going to redeem a remnant from every single tribe and nation and that hasn't happened yet. So we proclaim to hasten the day of the Lord.

The fourth perspective P in how we live in the until is we come peacefully or we wait peacefully. We should not have any doubt whatsoever of whether or not He will come. Now, we may not know whether or not He'll come in our lifetime, but we should have no doubt whatsoever whether or not He will come. This past year, my wife Sonya and I were riding back from an event in Nashville, and that happened to be the day that North Carolina was playing Duke in basketball at Duke. It was coach K's last game. For whatever reason that I won't go into, I've been an enormous North Carolina basketball fan since I was a little boy. Basically, Auburn and Alabama basketball were terrible, so don't get onto me now. North Carolina is just better and you can't really argue that. My oldest daughter, Kit, lives in Memphis and so any time we get on the phone with Kit, I don't really care what else is going on in the world. We were talking with Kit all the way back on this trip and I forgot that the game was even on.

I did pass along North Carolina basketball to my daughter, Kit and she has treasured that up appropriately in her heart and so she says, "Dad, you're not going to believe this. North Carolina beat Duke in basketball." I mean, I literally didn't believe it. So we got home. I had recorded the game because I knew we'd be driving and I'd want to watch it. I sat there and I watched North Carolina beat Duke in basketball. Coach K's last game at Cameron. As I sat there, I was nervous. I checked and did see that everyone was declaring the North Carolina won, but I was still nervous. I can't tell you how many times I rechecked the score. As I was pondering this, I said to myself, "Bruce, you're the same way for you knew the outcome, but you didn't act like you did." Even though I knew the outcome as I watched the game somehow I was still in doubt. That's the way I can be with the return of the Lord.

Sometimes it looks like you know the outcome and other times it looks like you're very much in doubt. Sometimes it looks like you know Christ is coming back and that's what your life is all about yet other times it looks like you're unsure and not living at peace, knowing that even in the midst of this unbelievably chaotic, simply absurd society everything is breaking and falling apart as people say the most ridiculous things you could ever possibly imagine, but believers know the outcome. As believers how does knowing this reflect our life? We know who is in control and that He is sovereign. Are we living in light of that? Ask yourself, is my testimony of the until reflective of the reality that Christ is coming back?

The fifth and last perspective P is progressing and I love it because during the until we make progress. We don't make progress because we're good, hard working people who get better. We make progress because this is a means of grace, because the Lord says, "I'm going to invite you to my table yet again and when I bring you to My table. I want you to examine yourself, ponder and treasure up the what this table declares to you. Consider the sin that's in your life, acknowledge it, and confess it." The Lord doesn't say, 'Come to the table perfect' because we're not perfect. He doesn't say come to the table as a reckless sinner. He actually says, 'If you have sin, you need to deal with it and then come to the table.' He is saying come to the table as a means of grace for God making progress.

Philippians 1:6 says *[6] And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* I am a work in progress and so are you. That progress sometimes looks like it's regressing, yet that Holy Spirit continues to work on us, to acknowledge and to confess our sin and to bring us back to that table again and again. When you hear this, don't hear that it's the act of actually physically coming to a table for it's the act of physically communing with God; partaking of His body, His blood, His sacrifice, and to our own selves proclaiming His death as we acknowledge His work of salvation.

If you're a believer reading this you could never be more justified than you are right now. It's impossible for you to be more justified because you are justified not getting justified, you are justified, but you can make progress. The Holy Spirit uses this in our heart and mind. If you stop for just a second to think about all that the world wants to promote in our hearts and minds about Christmas, none of it points to this right here. Not one commercial directs you to this table, not one greeting card, movie, or book points us to this service. That's not what the message that the world has. They will let us have our little Christmas and our little celebrations about Jesus, but they're not pointing us to this right here.

The Holy Spirit points us to this right here. The Holy Spirit says to each of us that no really good true Christmas celebration can be complete without coming to the Lord's table, without coming before Him; communing with Him, acknowledging our sin beforehand, reminding ourselves of His sacrifice for our sin, and claiming that forgiveness which He extends to us. If you're not a believer then this Table points you to the Savior, not the Table, not us and if you will contact us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 we'd love to talk to you about how you can come to know the Savior so you can have life everlasting with Him also. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for Your Word and Your Spirit. Lord, We thank You for Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank You that we can celebrate His advent into this world and that we can celebrate that by celebrating the reason for which You sent Him for He came to save His people from their sins. Lord, guide and direct us by Your Spirit even now, as we come

to this Table. Use this Table as a means of grace in our life to grow us, mature us, and help us to be more like Christ. Lord, use the reality of this Table to open blind eyes and deaf ears that they may hear, see and understand the Good News of the Gospel – the Good News of great joy and peace among all with whom You are well pleased. We pray that in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.