

“Come to the Table with Thanksgiving”

I Corinthians 11:23–29

Jim Alexander

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I Corinthians 11 is a passage we come to often when we take of the Lord's Table so it's familiar to many yet for others, it may seem fresh and new. What a truly exciting time to come and participate in the Lord's Table. Every time that we come to the Lord's Table, I'm aware that we can come to it without really embracing the meaning, the depth and breadth of what this Table means. So, my encouragement to us is that we want to be careful with what's familiar. We can be so familiar with something that it actually becomes commonplace. We also want to be careful as we go to a passage that we know well that we try to just unfold it the way it should be unfolded. For instance, for a pastor, I think many times, Advent becomes a little bit of a challenge. I mean, how do you talk about the birth of Christ in a new and inventive way? You don't and it's the same with the Lord's Table. We want to come and share God's Word just clearly as it is recorded for us and yet we want to come in a way that we can see it with fresh eyes and take away appreciating something about the Lord's Table more deeply than we have before today.

I recently read about a college bound coed that was returning to college and she was going to take a painting with her that she used to hang over her grandmother's bed. This was a picture that she had always enjoyed when she was a little girl. She had seen it many times and enjoyed particularly that it was a painting of Native American Indians but then she began to realize as she got older, the painting took on less and less significance. She barely looked at it at all, if ever, until her grandmother passed away. Now that the painting had become hers, she had a new interest in it. When she took it down off the wall there was that pesky mosquito that had gotten trapped under the glass and had been there for all those years, still blocking something of the picture's beauty. So, she took the picture outside and in the light, she uncovered the picture. She realized what she thought was a print was actually an oil painting on a canvas. With that in mind, she thought she would get an idea of what it was valued. She took it to a couple of local art appraisers and they told her, the value was probably somewhere between \$200 and \$300.

She wasn't quite satisfied with that and had heard of that Antiques Roadshow was in town and by the way, that is a show of my father-in-law who lives with us, loves to watch every Monday night. He loves to see all the old things because some of them he grew up with and he loves to see what their value is today and did they hold value over the years. She took it to the Antiques Roadshow experts, and when they looked at it the conversation began. They became more and more excited. They told her that this was a painting done around 1892 by a French born American artist, Henry Francois Farney, who loved to paint native Americans and they were especially interested in this painting because of the dense grouping of the subject matter that he had done, which made his paintings all the more valuable. After their assessment they told her it is between \$200,000 and \$300,000. Sometimes seeing something just in a fresh light can let us appreciate it all the more for its true value.

That's my prayer that as we turn now to God's Word, that we might value the Lord's Supper even more as we read this passage. Hearing from the Apostle Paul, I Corinthians 11:23-29 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.

This is God's holy and inspired Word by His grace and mercy may it now be preached for you.

Every time that we come to the Lord's table, we know that we're coming to a solemn celebration of great significance. I believe it will only increase our estimation of this sacrament if we take time to follow Paul's train of thought as he gives us what Jesus gave to him regarding the Lord's Supper. In I Corinthians 11:23, Paul directs our thinking to the origin of the Lord's Table as he lets us know that this was something that he received from the Lord, and that's what he has delivered to us. Clearly Paul states that observing the Lord's Supper is not something that he came up with, nor any other man came up with. It's not a man-made tradition or something from the church. Rather, it is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Himself. Paul definitively tells us, that he passed along to you what he first received from the Lord.

Now, in keeping with what Paul would tell this same church in this same letter, when he says in I Corinthians 15:3, *[3] For I deliver to you as a first importance what I also receive that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures* and in concert with what he would write to the church in Galatia, in Galatians 1:12, *[12] For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*, I believe Paul is going out of his way to make sure that we understand what we do at the Lord's Table and even why we come to the Lord's Table. It is something that was given to him by the Lord.

Paul begins by laying out at first for us what Jesus did when He instituted the Lord's Supper on the night that He was celebrating the Passover for the last time with His disciples. For centuries, the Jews have been celebrating the Passover ever since God had delivered them from Egypt. After the last of the ten plagues all the firstborn of Egypt were killed, including the livestock and yet for all of the Jews, for those who by faith slaughtered a lamb, put the blood on the on the top and sides of the door posts, all of those were spared when the death angel came through. Then God said 'from now on, celebrate this day as a memorial. Do this to remember what God has done to deliver you.'

So here is Jesus with His disciples celebrating the Passover yet again, likely the third time that they have celebrated it together but He is doing it knowing full well what He is about to face, even as He is here bringing them to the Lord's Supper. He is also fully aware that He is about to be sacrificed Himself. So, Paul is telling us that the blood of the Lamb is what matters and that Jesus, on that Passover night, knowing He was about to be betrayed, took the bread, broke it, and gave thanks, saying, "This is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me 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." So, Paul clearly has given to us something that Jesus gave to him.

I wonder, is there any other support for this? Do we have record of it anywhere else that this is exactly as Jesus had done? We do. All three of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke give us an account of this night and of this activity by Jesus with His disciples. I'll refer only to Luke's just for clarity and simplicity's sake but listen to Luke's account of this in Luke 22:19-20 which says *[19] And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and*

gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." [20] And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.

Jesus first took the bread, which was representative of His body, which was about to be broken on behalf of sinners like you and me. He gave thanks to the Father for that very element. It's interesting because as He gives thanks for that element, He's not just thanking God for the element itself, He is actually thanking God that as He is breaking the bread, as he is looking ahead to within one day's time would be His own torturous death when His body would be broken for our sins. Likewise, in the same way we're told, Jesus then took the cup and giving thanks to His Father not again, only for the element but for what the element represents. He again thanks His Heavenly Father for loving us so much that it would please the Father to crush Him His Son, so that His blood would be shed in order to ratify the New Covenant on our behalf.

So, Paul, along with the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, recounts how Jesus made a direct connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. Jesus is presented as the only One who, being God in the flesh, could transform the sign of the Old Covenant, the Passover meal, into something entirely new. But the Apostle also, I think, is wanting us to go much further back in church history than this, because when we think of covenantal terms, we have to go back to when the covenant was initiated with Abram. Abram back in Genesis 15 was to have a time with God, where God was telling him that he should take certain animals that God prescribed. Abram would sacrifice the animals. He would spill their blood, He would cut the animals in half, laying half of the animal on one side and a half on the other. This, by the way, was a common practice in that day. One of the ways to guarantee that your word was good was to sacrifice an animal, lay one half over here, the other half over there, and then the two parties entering into agreement would walk between the animals as though to say, 'If I failed to keep my end of this agreement, you do the same thing to me that we just did to these animals.'

With this covenant being made between God and man, there is no way, man can keep that covenant. So, God knowing full well that that was impossible, as Abram has already sacrificed and split the animals in half, while he's even beating the birds of prey away and growing fatigued from this, God puts him into a deep sleep. Then God alone walked through the halves of the animal. That was important because God alone was the One making and ratifying the covenant. He was saying even back with Abram in Genesis 15 in essence, 'if I fail to keep My word, My covenant' which He cannot do because God can never change, nor can He lie or break His promise, 'you do the same to Me.' He was also saying, on behalf of Abram and all who by faith are of Abraham's seed, the same thing for us. He was saying, "If you fail to keep the covenant, if you fail to live that sinlessly perfect life, if you fail in any way, shape or form, then you do the same to My Son." Even in Genesis 15, it was just a type or a shadow of the reality that would come into full view in the New Testament, when Jesus willingly would become the Passover Lamb slain from before the foundations of the world, slain in real time so that we might have repentance and faith.

So as the first Covenant was actually confirmed with the entire nation of Israel, with Moses, Moses at Mount Sinai ratified the Covenant by sprinkling blood on the altar on the Book of the Covenant, as well as on the people of God themselves. Every drop of blood they was shed with every sacrifice throughout the Old Testament was merely a picture pointing ahead to the need of a blood of much higher cost, the blood of Jesus Christ shed on our behalf. It kept pointing to the truth that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission for sin.

Paul continues now to tell us why we come to this Table again and again. I Corinthians 11:26 says *[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.* Now, while there are some variations of interpretation or application as to how we observe this, with some churches doing the Lord's Table once a quarter, other churches following more of the method that we do, of doing it roughly once a month with a season of preparation before we do communion. Other churches do it every week. While there are some variations about how you do this, the reason we come to the Table is perfectly clear. Every time we come to this Table, we declare Jesus' victory at the cross. Yes, we remember that He died to save us from our sins, but far from only looking to our past this is something we want to never forget. We look back in order to look forward in faith. Jesus said "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do proclaim the Lord's Death until He comes."

For me, that was something this week that I really had to let simmer for a while to sink in, because how many times have I come to the Lord's Table only remembering how many times have I come without thinking or even expecting the Lord to come back even before the elders uncover the table today? What if He comes back now? Every time we come to this Table, every time we proclaim His death, we are doing it looking forward because there's more to unfold for Jesus is coming back to claim His bride as His own. Being a pastoral care pastor I help with a lot of funerals here at the church, help some of you as you've gone through the loss of your loved ones but, I'm at a point right now that I'm about ready to say, "Even so, Lord Jesus, just come. Quit taking us home one at a time and bring us all to You forever right now." But until that time, I want to be faithful with His Word, even in how we look to His Table. You see, there is that day coming, that glorious day of triumph, where with the shout of the archangel and the blast of the mighty trumpet of God, Jesus will return and He will come back and He will take us to be His own. But today we remember His death until He comes. We proclaim His death.

I think one additional aspect to the Lord's Table, though, that Paul wants us to consider is if we had had time to look at the opening verses of I Corinthians 11:17-22, we would have seen that there's a problem going on in the church at Corinth. In this church, where they're coming to the Lord's Table where there's this wonderful celebration of the unity of the body of Christ, they were actually creating discord and disunity instead. The wealthy were coming earlier and they were bringing a feast and they were imbibing in the wine, alcohol and eating the feast, almost like in a gluttonous way, all before the rest of the people could show up so that when the poor arrived there was little to nothing left for them to have in this love feast. So Paul is going to write to them that all things should be done decently and in order.

Here in I Corinthians 11:27-29, we see the orderliness of the Lord's Table, as it says *[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.* Jesus cautions us that whenever we come to this Table, we are to come in a worthy manner. We are to come examining ourselves, our relationship with Christ and our relationships with each other. That's important. We look at the relationship on the vertical and on the horizontal plane each time we come to this Table. We are to come confessing sin, doing all that we can to be right in Him. We know we're unable to come as those who are so sinlessly perfect. We're to come as sinners in need of both mercy and grace so we are to come looking to be met with the spiritual strengthening that this sacrament provides.

I'd like you to consider with me just a little more in detail what it means to come to the Table in a worthy manner. Our pastor has taught us well many times over regarding this command, but I think it bears repeating it again today. We cannot come as though we are worthy in and of ourselves, but we can come in a manner that is worthy. What does this mean? I think whenever we come to the Table, we are to come examining ourselves, first of all, to make sure that we are truly in Christ. Does my life in private as well as in public, in my words, as well as my deeds, bear witness to the fact that I belong to Jesus Christ? Is there enough evidence to prove that I've been bought with a price that I am not my own, but I belong entirely only to God, and I'm living for His glory alone?

We also come examining ourselves not only as to whether or not we are in the faith, but we come examining ourselves as to the condition of our faith. What is my walk with Christ like right now? Am I loving His Word? Am I loving spending time with Him? Do I desire to be here with the body of Christ as much as I used to? We come examining our relationship with God. We come examining our relationship with each other, and that's calling us to confess. That's calling us to repentance. That's calling us to renewed faith.

When we come to this Table it is a time for us to reflect on how things are at home, husband to wife, wife to husband, parents to children, grandchildren. It's time for us to reflect on how are things here with each other. Have I sinned against someone here that I have not tried as much as I can to make it right with them? Is there someone here who has sinned against me that I have not gone to them and said, 'we need to go to God's Word and make this right between us'? When we come to the Lord's Table, it's a time for us to make sure that not only that we are in Christ, but that we are right with God through Christ present tense as well as right with each other. 'As far as it depends on me,' Paul says in Romans 12:18, 'I want to live peaceably with all men.' So these are questions that we can ill afford to tread lightly or answer without careful consideration.

Not only do we come first examining ourselves, but we come in faith. Each time we partake of this sacrament, we're reminded that Jesus is the Host and we come as invited guests. You can only come to this Table when you have the invitation. Some may try to come to the Table, but they will be cast out. Jesus says, "you cannot partake of this sign, if you've never partaken of what is signified." The sign is simply the elements that are presented on the Table. What was signified is the right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His death on our behalf so we must come in faith.

We also must come in unity. There's another name for this Table. We often call it communion, co - mmunion. We come as those who have been unified as God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are one, we are to come in that same unity of the body as we come to this Table. This Table bears witness to the fact that the world can know that we are Christians by our love. I think there's no greater way to deny the power of the Gospel than to deny the unity within the body for whom Christ died. As one author put it that I read this week, 'nowhere is the Gospel made more visible than in the body of Christ, assembled and unified around the body of Christ.'

We also come in need. We come in order to be spiritually strengthened, to be nourished, to be fortified. We come for strengthening grace. We come for intimate fellowship with God through Christ and with each other. We come remembering, remembering not only what Christ did historically, but what He did personally for each one of us who, by saving faith, know Him as Savior and Lord and yet we even come with anticipation, looking ahead. We come expecting that this is going to give us spiritual strength. We come expecting that we're going to be

nourished, refreshed, and restored. We come looking forward to His return, living as though He might suddenly be here at any moment. So, we come to this table also as a witness and a testimony to each other and to the world watching. When people are here in a worship service and they don't yet know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, they are watching how we worship. They are watching what we did with our communicant members. They're watching what we do when we baptize and what we do when we come to the sacrament of the Lord's Table. This is a witness to the truth that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever should believe will not perish, but have life everlasting (John 3:16).

So, we've looked at the origin of the table, the orderliness of the table but Paul also wants us to respond to the table even as we come and the response to this table, I think, is also our take away. We are to respond with thanksgiving. A heart overflowing with thanksgiving is the natural response when we come to the Lord's Supper, seeing it for all that it is. When we see Him for all that He is – the greatest and truest friend of all sinners – when we see all that He has done – the greatest beyond our wildest imagination, act of kindness when He laid down His life for us, we can't help but come with thanksgiving. Jesus lived the perfect sinless life that was required of us if we were ever to be made right with God but we couldn't do it on our own. Jesus also died the horrendous death that we deserve so that we do not have to go through it ourselves and He rose again, proving that He is the one accepted Sacrifice on our behalf, satisfying all the righteous demands of God. So, we come in thanksgiving for this sacrament, which is a tangible reminder that we need because we're prone to forget.

In my garage/workshop I have a couple of things that I really enjoy. One is this toolbox that was from my grandfather who was a tool and dye maker. It has all these neat little compartments filled with tools. A lot of the tools are his but some are my dad's and one of the tools in that box when I pull it out is a paintbrush – an expensive one. I don't use it for anything because I don't clean paint brushes that well and my dad made sure I knew that as a kid growing up. He told me often I would have to go back and clean it again but this paintbrush was my dad's. We used this paintbrush for our wood boat. We had a wood Lyman boat that every year you had to repaint, and every year you had to put on more marine varnish and about every three years you had to take out the blowtorch to melt that old paint and varnish off and do it all over again. Whenever I open that drawer and I look at that brush, it's as though I can smell that marine varnish as if we're still doing it today.

When we come to this Table, it's our visual reminder. It is something of a visual sermon to us that displays the love of God and Jesus Christ, His Son, so that we who are prone to forget, don't forget how priceless and how precious this table truly is. So, we come remembering. We come thankful for the privilege to be spiritually strengthened and renewed. This is a time for us to be refueled, spiritually speaking, when we come to this Table. As we do so and we are refreshed in spirit, we are then able to enter into every other sphere of our life in a new and meaningful way.

So, husbands and wives, when you go home this afternoon, coming to this Table should make a difference in your conversation. When you go to the workplace tomorrow coming to this Table should make a difference in how you interact, how you work as unto the Lord, not unto men. When you are in your neighborhood and you're speaking with your neighbors and because you've come to this Table and been refueled, spiritually speaking, you should be overflowing with the love of God and Jesus Christ, ready to share with a neighbor how they too can have peace with God through Jesus Christ, His Son. When we come together as the body of Christ

here, as one church, we should be renewed and refueled and able to come in unity saying, 'Lord, whatever You want, we will do.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, help us even now, because as we come to this Table, we come only because You have made it so. Through Jesus Christ You have given us mercy and grace. You have filled us with Your Spirit that we can understand and appreciate the depth, breadth and the meaning of this Table. Even now, as we come to this Table with thanksgiving, we thank You for Your eternal love, for the work that You are doing in our hearts, in our lives, and in our church as we long to make much of Jesus Christ and give Him all the glory. So help us now, Lord, that we might celebrate this Table well, for Your glory alone in Jesus' Name, Amen.