

Communion * Luke 22:7-20

Introduction:

Good morning, it is a great honor to have the opportunity to share with you this morning. If you missed church last Sunday, you missed a great service. Pastor Chris spoke on Baptism and in total there were 24 people baptized last Sunday! Praise the Lord.

We were even able to watch, via video, a few of our brothers and sisters from the Akolet church in Papua New Guinea get baptized. The church there had their first ever baptism service a couple weeks ago, where 22 people were baptized!

This morning we are going to talk about the other ordinance that God has instituted in His church, which is communion. Where as baptism is a one-time act of proclaiming Christ work in a person's life and an affirmation of one's desire to follow Christ. Communion is something that God has encouraged us as a body of believers to partake of often! It has a recurrent aspect to it, unlike baptism!

This morning, the plan is for me to talk about two aspects of communion and Jeremy talk about two aspects of communion and then we will partake of the elements together. This entire service is going to be focused around the communion table.

I want to start by simply sharing with you, what is biblical definition of Communion. I think we all have somewhat of as idea, they may vary a little, but for the most part we would agree. For a lot of us, our ideas about communion might come from the church we grew up in, the traditions of a particular denomination. I think its good to, as a church family, come together and all get on the same page when it comes to these important family celebrations! We need to know why we do this together! If we don't, we are missing the whole point of communion!

Communion is a communal meal of the church in which we live in authentic community and collectively give thanks to our redeemer, Jesus Christ!

There are 4 aspects of the Lords Supper that we want to show you in scripture this morning. All of them are important and necessary – and our celebration of communion can be missing something if we over-look one or more of these, or if we give only one area all the focus. First, communion is clearly a remembrance, a reflecting, or looking back. Secondly, in the course of this looking back, there is a “looking around” or a horizontal fellowship that takes place. I will be showing you these two aspects. Then Jeremy – tell us the other two aspects you will walk us through.

(Jeremy) Matt, those first two are so important: looking back and looking around, but it's been fun to study this with you this week and see that “looking around” or this horizontal fellowship is so closely tied to the 3rd aspect which is our vertical fellowship with our Father – or a “looking up.” We really don't want to have one without the other. And then finally as sweet and moving as it is to look back and remember, we have to know that the best is yet to come. I mean, we have so much to look forward to (like a bazillion years with our Savior and each other.) So the 4th aspect is this “looking forward” or anticipation.

So we flipped a coin, did rock paper scissors, and arm wrestled – and since I won all 3 of those contests – you went whining to Leonard and he said you could go first!

(Matt)

1) The first aspect of communion I want to touch on is that Communion is a Memorial, it is about remembering, and it has the idea of looking back and giving thanks!

We see this in Luke 22:7-20 where Jesus was with his disciples and instituted the first Communion meal. But I think it is important to understand why the disciples and Jesus were gathering for this particular meal.

Read passage

They had made preparations for the Passover meal.

Those three verses tell us that Jesus wanted to have the Passover and that His disciples were ready to prepare it and that He had made some plans so that it could, in fact, be prepared. And in verse 21 it says, "And they did eat." So, here we come to the final Passover that our Lord has with His disciples.

The Passover celebrated God's delivering Israel out of bondage in Egypt where they'd been for over 400 years. And you remember, God began to send plagues on the Egyptians and the last plague was the death of all the firstborn in every family in Egypt. And God said to them, "If you will kill a lamb and a spotless lamb and put the blood of that lamb on the doorposts and the crosspiece, when the angel of death comes to slay all the firstborn of Egypt, if he sees the blood on your door he will pass over." And that's the Passover. He will pass over your house, pass beyond your house and spare your life. And as a result of that, Pharaoh said, "Get out, I've had it! That's all I can take." And he sent the Jews out and God ultimately delivered them.

The Passover meal was very festive, celebratory, it was rejoicing and expressing thanks for God's deliverance, it was also a time to share with each other, families, adults and children alike, the story of God's faithfulness!

But during this meal, Jesus did something, he took the bread and broke it and said, "This is my body, given for you, **do this in remembrance of me.**"

This was out of the ordinary; you see the Passover also had an anticipatory aspect to it as well. They were also looking for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them once and for all. When Jesus broke the bread and said this is my body, given for you. He was saying, the one you have been waiting for is here!

This morning, when we come to the Lord's Table, it is an opportunity to look back and remember what Jesus has done for us. To rejoice in the story of our redemption through Jesus Christ! It is a story of redemption, of deliverance, of salvation! It is an even greater story than Israel's deliverance from Egypt!

Communion is a time to stop and look back and reflect on God's faithful provision of Jesus Christ. He wants us to remember his sacrifice in order to save us!

2) The second aspect is that Communion is a Fellowship, it is to be done in a community, it is to encourage us to look around and give thanks for the community God has placed us in...the community of believers called the church!

There is a vertical aspect to communion, in which we give thanks to God for redeeming us saving us because of what Jesus Christ did for us in the cross, Jeremy is going to be talking about this in a few minutes. But there is also a community or horizontal aspect of communion in which we purposefully gather as believers to celebrate what we have in common. The biggest thing is our salvation through Jesus Christ! So we are to gather to celebrate our salvation and encourage each other in this truth!

Communion has the idea of a community experience; it was intended to have a relational aspect! I think we have lost some of this aspect of Communion. (Refer back to our definition of communion)

Communion is a communal meal of the church in which we live in authentic community and collectively give thanks to our redeemer, Jesus Christ!

To understand that the early church shared in a communion meal together and then look at the cracker and cup, we have to say, this is not a meal...maybe we are missing something. How did we go from a meal together to a cracker and a cup? Communion has become this isolated experience between God and us. That is never what it was intended for it to just become! We could blame our modern culture where we value individualism over community. We have a tendency to like to isolate ourselves and be private. So an individual concept of communion fits well in our culture. The problem is that its just not a biblical model of what communion is supposed to be.

Communion is an opportunity to live out authentic community! Just before he broke the bread, he washed the disciples feet, as an example to us that we are called to serve one another! In fact, in the early church, we see evidences that communion was a way of caring for the poor within the church community!

Look at **Acts 2:42-47**- they met needs as they shared in the breaking of bread, every day at the beginning! They cared so they shared!

This is evidence that there is a huge horizontal aspect of communion! In fact there was one church that was rebuked for taking communion in an unworthy manner, do you remember which church that was? The Church in Corinth! What was the problem, was it a horizontal or vertical problem? It was a horizontal one!

Let's look at **I Corinthians 11:17-22**. Here is a list of the problems: they were experiencing disunity, why? Because each one goes ahead of the other, individual's thinking only of themselves only, not making sure there is enough for everyone, despising the church (community of believers) by humiliating those who have needs in the church. Bottom line, they were only looking out for themselves!

These folks had forgotten the community and Paul makes it clear that this is serious stuff! There was a hierarchy at the communion meal. They were not caring for others in the church...and Paul makes it is pretty clear how wrong it is to not care about our brothers and sisters! The context in I Corinthians is not just between you and God; it's between you and your community as well! It's Horizontal.

Taking communion and not caring about your community around you is the issue here!

1 Cor. 11:29-34. If we eat without recognizing the body of the Lord. The church is the body of Christ! When recognize the body by acknowledging it and lovingly caring for the community of believers!

The purpose of communion is to come together to remember and celebrate the victory of the cross! It's a victory party! Yes, there is a place for serious reflection, 1 Corinthians encourages us to examine ourselves, but we also need to can come ready to celebrate, rejoice and give thanks for the victory we all have because of Christ!

In fact, the practice of communion at our church looks a whole lot more like the practice of the second century church than that of the first century church. Church history tells us that soon after the turn of the second century, churches began to do token communion services. They would eat their dinners at home and then they would show up at church to have token communion services. They would drink just a little bit of wine and eat just a little bit of bread. They probably adopted that practice, the practice that we are accustomed to today, because of Paul's rebuke in 1 Corinthians 11. He said that there was disunity among them. In order to eliminate that, the early church said, "Let us set aside the meal. Let us just have a ceremonial communion celebration with just a little bit of bread and just a little bit of wine, so that we are all on the same playing field."

I understand why the church might have decided to make this change, but along the way, I think we might be missing an aspect of communion that God intended us to experience.

I know this might be a little tough to hear; communion has always been a time of quiet reflection, there is a place for that, but its also supposed to be so much more!

I grew up in this church, I am pretty sure I can say that we here at Harmony Bible Church have and still do practice the vertical aspect of communion very well. But, can I gently say, we might have a little work to do on the horizontal aspect of communion? We can work toward this together so we can more fully experience what communion is intended to be.

Jeremy, why don't you come and share the other two aspects of biblical communion! I am excited to hear what God has laid on your heart!

(Jeremy) Matt, thanks for leading us in that! I know you and I talked a lot this week about this horizontal or looking around aspect of communion. That Jesus and his disciples had the table. and we've lost the table in communion anymore! We kind of joked about you and I going to the Jumbo Buffet and trying that - but that's not the kind of community you were talking about. To be honest with you folks, anytime Matt and I walk into the Jumbo Buffet in Mt. Pleasant, the owner just starts shaking his head. He immediately starts grumbling under his breath about a complete loss of profit for that day, and mumbling something about calling in the extra dish washer guy, that's a bad sign!

But I know that in all seriousness, the meal that Jesus was sharing when he ordained the 1st communion, it wasn't a "common meal," it was a special meal and it had a very special purpose to it. It was very intentional, and we've seen in Acts that the focus wasn't on the food, but on what God had accomplished for us in Jesus.

Not only did the Lord's Supper have a special looking back, and a special horizontal celebration to it, the whole thing is **centered** upon what God the Father was accomplishing through God the Son. A community, a communal meal is useless without looking up to recognize what God has done.

And Jesus accomplished what we could not. He bore what we could not possibly bear. He has done what only God can do! Look, I think from here on out in this message it becomes very difficult to describe with mere words what He has willingly done for us. Difficult in the sense that if we don't *feel* the weight, communion becomes a ritual. If we don't, as Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me," then we have a cracker and a thimble of juice. Let's look upward toward God now, and prepare our hearts for Biblical communion.

Let's look at Matthew's account of the Last Supper. We'll pick it up in chapter 26, verse 27.

²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the ^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

When we talk about "looking up" this morning, we are into an area where this is simply **everything** to us. When you lay in bed at night and stare at the ceiling, and you're alone with yourself, and like a wave rushing over your body, everything you know about yourself comes to the forefront of your mind, kind of all at once. You are instantly aware of your secret wickedness. You know the selfishness and pride that lurks in your heart, just under the surface. And nobody else knows...but we know. And you know God can see it. And you beat it back for a while, but a week later there it is again!

We need the perfect Lamb of God. We need God to do something! I would submit to you that it is healthy for us to feel that weight. But when it comes to communion, what turns this from a doom and gloom ritual into a celebration is that we need to feel the weight of our sin being lifted! That is the new covenant in His blood for the forgiveness of sins. It's gone! As far as the east is from the west, never to be brought up again. How can that get old to us? There are a million good reasons I should be cast into hell, but because of this New Covenant in His blood, God chooses to not remember a single one (at the cost of the life of his Son.) In a little bit when we celebrate communion together, don't be bashful about how thankful you are. Don't be bashful; this isn't some game. The weight of sin has been mercifully lifted and thrown off. I pray you will feel that freedom that weight - gone. We love to think about grace and we celebrate that at communion. We love to think about mercy and we celebrate that, but sometimes we

don't talk a lot about wrath. But when we "look up" at communion, we shouldn't overlook it either.

In 1st Corinthians Paul says "For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup... we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes". There's a proclamation in communion! We proclaim Christ crucified! The most horrible form of death – you and I when we drink the cup, we drink the cup of promise, the cup of the new covenant. We remember the life giving blood that was shed. Jesus drank from the cup of wrath. Do you remember when he was in the garden praying, He asked God the Father that if it were possible – let this cup "pass from me" – and He said, "not my will, but yours be done." The cup that Jesus took was the wrath being stored up for you and for me.

God Almighty is a God of love, but He is also a God of justice. And the same power that God used to create galaxies, and hold stars into place and solar systems, the same awesome power that causes a giant sun to burn at incredible temperatures, all of that power is also angry about sin. His Justice demands it! We don't like to think about God's wrath. And we certainly don't like to think about His fury toward our rebellion. You know we like to think and say "Well, God just overlooked sin, He's a big soft mushy God and He just says... aww shucks, we'll just forget that ever happened. Where's the justice in that? Where's the holiness in that? If a Judge in Des Moines County **overlooked the evidence** and let rapists, drug dealers, wife beaters, thugs off, they'd run him out of town in a heartbeat. They'd say, "Where's the justice! Someone has to pay!" Someone did pay - Jesus Christ – the sinless Son of God! God laid on Him the iniquities of us all. Justice was served, and the wrath of God was satisfied. That is the new covenant in His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

I know that in a room this size with this many people, there are more than a few who believe that they will be just fine standing on their own record. That they will be somehow in the top 51% - not great, but good enough. Friend, the Bible says you will indeed get what you deserve. You will get your wages, and the wages of sin is death. And you can expect nothing but condemnation. I would plead with you right now to lay down your rebellion and put all of your hope in the only One who is able to save you. The One who hundreds of years before He was born it was written: *But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement (punishment or wrath) that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.* He's calling you right now. I pray that today when you celebrate communion you will tell the person next to you or the person you came with, that TODAY this Jesus became your Savior. We have much to celebrate and look up and give thanks at communion, friends! Amen?

If today was the day of your salvation, or if that happened 30 years ago, communion also calls us to look forward to the most incredible banquet we can imagine. Matt, you talk about a "communal meal," I can't wait for this man!

Let's go back to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 26, verse 29, Jesus says this: "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

Jesus says, "Guys, we're having a meal tonight, but the next time we do this together we are going to have the most incredible banquet you can possibly imagine!" Did you know that? Do you know that the best is yet to come? When we have communion together we can celebrate and look forward to the most amazing banquet imaginable! Listen, we aren't going to give a hoot about trans-fats! There will be no government mandated nutrition labels. "Oh my, would

you look at the calories from fat in this?" No sir! I have no idea if God will bring back the Twinkie or the Ho-Ho or not, but there is going to be a banquet, and listen, not one single believer will be missing!

You will not be late; you will not wonder what to wear, because God Himself will provide you with fine white linens. You will not have to bring a covered dish – this is not a potluck, or a chili-dump. And you won't have to remember to grab the empty dish when it's over so your wife doesn't yell at you, because the feast will never end. And listen, it's not like it's just a giant jumbo buffet because the focus is not on the food – but on the Glory of God.

Let's look at this communal meal that Jesus was talking about. In scripture it's called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19)

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,
"Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.
9 And the angel said[a] to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Again, the words are right there in front of us but I don't think we "get it." I don't think our minds know what to do when John says that the praise of God will be like the "Roar of many waters" or "Mighty peals of thunder." But you know what, I think we should try. I think church is **participatory**! I think if we tried it right here, right now this morning, many of you will never forget it. Scripture says we believers will cry out HALLELUJAH – FOR THE LORD OUR GOD THE ALMIGHTY REIGNS! Now there will be billions of people doing this in heaven – so 1,000 of us are just a fraction of the praise going up.

But C'mon – not in unison – start at just a murmur and read it over and over. And now in a normal tone, just at whatever pace you want, start repeating the line on the screen, keep repeating it. Louder! Now cry it out!

Billions someday, of every color, from every nation - it may have felt a little awkward this morning – but one day we will not be able to restrain ourselves when we see Him face to face.

John in Revelation calls this the marriage supper. Christ is the Groom and we His Church, all believers, are His Bride. (If you picture me or Matt in a wedding dress you will ruin this picture.)

John chose the picture of a Hebrew wedding for a significant reason. A Hebrew wedding had 3 stages and it is significant for us as we study communion. First there was the betrothal (more than engagement.) Where the bride is selected and promised to the groom. Brothers and sisters, you, individually and personally, we're chosen by God before the foundation of the world. God looked out from eternity past – and said – "That one right there. I want that one in

my family.” Not because you were cute, or rich, or funny, or smart, but solely based upon His great Love. At the time of the betrothal a dowry had to be paid to the bridegrooms’ parents – in this case – God the Father. But the problem is we have NOTHING to bring. What could we possibly give God the Father? The Dowry paid is the shed blood of Christ – and Jesus shed that blood on our behalf. He has paid the price. So we are His bride, and we are promised to Him.

The second phase of a Hebrew wedding came after some time – usually a year – but there was a waiting period – and then the groom (like in the story of the 10 virgins) would show up with all his friends, usually at night, with a very festive parade of torches. Where He would lead a procession through the streets to the third phase, the Wedding Supper, the celebration we just finished reading about. And happily ever after. The Groom is coming for His Bride. Jesus is coming, friends. The price has been paid – He is coming soon to begin this banquet. As we celebrate Communion this morning, we have so much to look forward to. And The best is yet to come.

Matt, come on over here buddy. Communion is so much more than a cracker and the world’s smallest cup of juice. It is celebrating the greatest news the world has ever known and it’s looking back and forward – and looking up and around.

Matt, I can’t wait to celebrate this morning – can you share some instructions with us this morning on how we might celebrate a little differently even this morning?

(Matt talks about getting together in groups – each group can talk about looking back and giving thanks, looking up, and forward, and especially looking around)

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