

The Lord's Table

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[0:00] Reflect. That was a really, really good video, but that's okay.

! I'm going to go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Harlan, if you would walk me through the slides today.

I don't have my remote. I'm not sure where it is right now, but if you just click me through. We're going to start off talking about the Lord's table.

So if you go back one slide, I want to ask you this. Have you ever been invited to someone else's table for supper? Anybody? Good.

Hopefully more than just raise their hands, because I feel really bad for you if you've never been invited to that. The experience that follows really depends on the host, doesn't it?

[1:18] There you go. Sometimes it's a dinner party that's really exclusive and formal. Maybe that one up top there. Those are, you know, they can be enjoyable at some level, maybe.

How many of you prefer the one down under it? Anybody? Yeah, me too. You're not worried about saying the wrong thing, wearing the right clothes, using the right fork.

I like the ones that are relaxed and homey, you know? You just walk in, you sit down, you feel like you belong. Today, Jesus is inviting us to a table, and his table.

We don't have to worry about setting it right, formal or informal. We don't have to worry about doing everything just right. But the question is, what should our attitude be at Jesus' table?

Only his children are invited to the table. Now, in our world, that's a hard line to draw.

[2:37] Supposed to be inclusive, not exclusive, right? Jesus invites everyone, but only his children have a seat at the table.

So you have to become his child. You want to have a seat at his table. All are invited to become his children by faith in him.

So the question for us this morning as we consider the Lord's table is not whether we're invited. The question is, what should our attitude be? Thank you. All right.

Our attitude should not be one of anxiety, should not be one of shame, should not be one of performance. Our attitude should be one of gratefulness, reflection, remembering, and redirection, not perfection.

If you think that you're going to approach the Lord's table and observe the elements that you see in these silver trays right in front of you down here, with a spirit of coming from a place of perfection, then you're wrong, you're misguided.

[3:53] It's a place of remembering, of reflecting, of being grateful, and of redirecting ourselves from off the path that maybe we've been distracted to walk down, and getting back on the straight and narrow path that walks in the footsteps of Jesus.

That leads us to our big idea for today. As we consider the Lord's table, what do we mean by the Lord's table? The Lord's table, the Lord's supper, communion, even the Eucharist, these are all religious terms that have been used by different groups that claim to follow Jesus over the years of church history, and they all mean the same thing, regularly gathering to remember the broken body, the shed blood that Jesus freely gave to forgive our sins, to restore our relationship with the Father. So, the big idea for today is this. The Lord's table is not a reward for our perfection. It's a refocusing of our direction.

Last Sunday, we looked ahead to 2026. By the way, happy 2026, everybody. It's here. We're in it. And we said that 2026, for our church, we're praying that it would be a year of direction, not perfection.

Well, the Lord's table is a wonderful opportunity to kick this year off by redirecting ourselves back onto focusing on Jesus.

[5:27] We had our starting point class this morning. We looked at Hebrews chapter 12, looking unto Jesus, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. That is the direction.

That's who we pursue. So, we're refocusing our direction as we prepare our hearts to observe the Lord's Supper or the Lord's table this morning. This table doesn't celebrate how well we're doing. It realigns us with where Jesus is leading us. So, we're in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We're going to look down at verse 17. As a few of you are still turning, I want to remind you, last Sunday, we kicked off 2026.

It's our year of direction, not perfection. Everything may not be perfect, but we have a direction laid out before us as a church and as individual families and people, members of the church.

So, today's teaching about the Lord's table is meant to reinforce that point. It invites honesty, not pretense, not pretending. And Paul is writing here in 1 Corinthians 11 to a church that was struggling.

[6:32] They were divided. They were selfish. They were careless with each other. And he addresses how then, coming from a place like that, how do they approach the Lord's table?

Picking up in verse 17, Paul writes, In the following instructions, I cannot praise you. He's just gotten done praising them for some of the things they're doing well. But he says in the following instructions here, I can't praise you for this.

It sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. Can we just pause right there for a second? Never in a church, right, would more harm than good be done. I say that a little bit facetiously, a little bit sarcastically, because oftentimes churches and their efforts to do good can end up doing harm.

We hate to see that. But it's been proven out time and time again. And that's why we've got to refocus our direction, not on our own perspectives, not on our own priorities, but back on the mission, the kingdom of God.

So, in the following instructions, he can't praise them. More harm than good is being done when they meet together. Verse 18, First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church.

[7:42] Again, we can't imagine that, right? A church being divided? Look, it happens. Anytime you get a group of people together, divisions might start to pop up.

That's why the Holy Spirit has to heal those, has to reunite us. That's why the consistent theme, when God ordained his church all the way through the New Testament, is unity, coming together, setting ourselves aside, making Jesus first, and giving ourselves less of a priority.

So, verse 20, when we meet together, not really interested in the Lord's Supper. Some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. You get a picture back into the first century church and how their Lord's Supper was going down back then.

As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. Sounds a little different than what we do here, doesn't it? What?

Paul says, kind of my reaction to, what? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? It's not what this whole meal is about. It's not what this observance of this table is about.

[8:58] He says, do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor, the less fortunate among you? What am I supposed to say? You want me to praise you?

Well, I'm certainly not going to praise you for this. That leads us directly to point number one. The table calls us. The table calls us. The table calls us to honesty.

The table calls us to honesty. Skip down to verse 28, would you? 1 Corinthians 11, 28. This is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup.

Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, before eating the bread and drinking the cup, you need to fix yourself. He doesn't say you need to make sure you're perfect.

He doesn't say you need to make sure you've cleaned up all the areas of your life. He says you need to examine yourself. And the implication is you need to do it honestly.

[10:02] You need to be real about your faults. You need to be real about your shortcomings. None of us want to dwell on those. We don't want to think about it.

We sure don't want other people to point it out. But we must examine ourselves. The Lord's table calls for honesty.

It doesn't mean condemn yourself. It means to be truthful. Paul teaches us, who is he that can condemn us? Nobody. Only Christ can condemn us.

And we have already been tried. We've already been brought before the judge, God himself, and found guilty. And that's when Jesus stepped in and said, I will make a way to forgive them.

I will make a way to make them right. And so if we have placed our faith in him and his forgiveness, then no one can condemn us. But we must examine ourselves and say, yes, even though I'm forgiven, I still have faults.

[11:05] I still have the ability to harm my brother or sister in Christ. I still have the ability to get my eyes off of Jesus and onto myself. So at the Lord's table, we stop pretending and we stop performing.

We stop pretending and we stop performing. The table is where we acknowledge what we really are. Where we really are.

Spiritually, emotionally, relationally. And we bring that reality before our loving, forgiving, but brutally honest God.

You ever felt like God was just brutally honest with you? Showed you unmercifully who you really are? But we know he is full of mercy, isn't he?

And even though he'll show us who we really are, he reminds us that I still love you anyway. I still extend you forgiveness and mercy anyway.

[12:08] So as we prepare our hearts to receive these elements, the bread and the juice, to remind ourselves of the body and blood of Jesus, we need a moment of honesty.

It calls for that. Stop pretending. It's not doing anybody any good. Stop performing. It doesn't impress like you think it does.

You don't examine yourself to disqualify yourself. You examine yourself to realign yourself. Realign your heart. How many of you get the idea in your head sometimes?

You don't have to raise your hand. But how many of you get the idea in your head sometimes that the longer you wander away from God, it takes just that long to come back? That's not how God works. The longer you wander away from God, he's still there.

He's still ready. At any moment, you can turn back to him and he receives you with open arms.

Now, you might have some scars that take a long time to heal. You might have some complications in your life that are going to take a long time to sort back out.

[13:17] But God is right there, ready to forgive, ready to welcome you back with open arms. So enough with the pretending. Enough with the performing. Realign yourself back with the heart of the Father.

And you're ready to observe these elements. Get your mind and your heart back with God. This is a GPS recalculation here.

You took the wrong route. But God's going to get you back where he wants you to be. And you realize you've drifted. The table doesn't shame you. It gently points you back to Jesus.

Point number two. The table calls for honesty. The table also points us to Jesus. It's what it does. The Lord's Supper.

Communion. When we take this together, it's not just a strange religious rite. It's not just a practice that we gather together four times a year and we say, all right, we've got to eat this weird cracker.

[14:19] We've got to drink grape juice. And it's the only time we do that all year long. I grew up drinking grape juice, but I never drink it anymore except at the Lord's Supper. But when we experience, when we taste the grace of God, it gives us direction.

It doesn't leave us rudderless. It doesn't leave us without a course. When we taste God's grace, it gives us purpose. It gives us direction.

The Lord's Supper reminds us that Jesus acted on our behalf before we had it all together. What does Romans 5.8 teach us? While we were still sinners, not good people, not got it all together, not

impressive upstanding members of the community.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us. They didn't like Jesus. He went where the sinners were. He hung out with what they called publicans and sinners, the people who were the black sheep of society, the people who the parents would say, don't hang out with that crowd.

Jesus went to them and said, I love you. I want to show grace to you. I want you to be healed. I want to forgive you. I want to restore you.

[15:42] And that is you and me. Such were you and I. We needed to be healed. We needed to be restored. Look at Luke chapter 22, verses 19 and 20.

This moment is described. Jesus took bread. He gave thanks to God for it. He broke it in pieces. He gave it to his disciples and he said, this is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. Then after supper, he took another cup of wine and he said, this cup is the new covenant between God and his people. An agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.

Now, don't miss the timing of how this happened. When this took place, Jesus offered his body and his blood knowing full well that in the next few hours, Peter would deny him.

Judas would betray him. The rest of his disciples would scatter. And Jesus still says, this is my body given for you. My blood poured out for you.

[16:50] Grace comes before growth. Grace comes before growth. God's love comes before our loyalty.

And that's what I want to remind you of. I want you to grow. I want you to be loyal. I want your heart to never wonder. I want that for myself and my family, my children as well.

The truth is, sometimes my growth and your growth is going to slow down. Sometimes our hearts are going to be disloyal and they're going to chase after something else. But God's grace is still strong.

God's grace is still abundant. His love is still overwhelming. It still conquers all. So this table and the remembrance of his sacrifice points us back to Jesus, the forgiving one, the gracious one, the merciful one.

Direction comes after his mercy. Then we get the direction. Oh, yeah. God really is good, isn't he? He really does love me, isn't he?

[18:00] He really doesn't hold a grudge against me, does he? I got to pursue him. I got to follow him. I got to be more like him. That's how I got to pattern my life. That's the blueprint. I've been following something else.

I've been listening to the wrong voices and holding up the wrong heroes. I got to get back to Jesus. Jesus doesn't say, follow me once you're fixed.

He says, follow me and I will heal what needs healing along the way. I will make you what you need to be. So grace doesn't excuse us from the direction that we need to walk in.

Grace empowers us to follow that direction. Grace empowers us to move forward with Jesus, the forgiving one.

The table calls for honesty. The table points us to Jesus. And finally this morning, the table gives us common direction. Common direction.

[19:06] We might be coming from different spots. But we're all moving toward the same goal. We might be at different places along our journey with Jesus.

But we're all following him. You might see the world differently than I do. But the one we're pursuing is the same. The Lord's Supper is not just personal.

Communion is communal. We do it together. Paul reminds this church that this meal doesn't just look backward to the cross and what he did.

It also looks forward. 1 Corinthians back in 1 Corinthians 11 that we read just a moment ago back up to 25 and 26. Jesus took the cup of wine after supper saying, This cup is the new covenant between God and his people.

An agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it. For every time, don't miss this, you eat this bread and you drink this cup, you are announcing or proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again.

[20:17] We've talked about that before here. But this whole idea is that one of forward movement and action on behalf of God's mission and God's kingdom.

That when we look back at the cross, we would then get our eyes fixed on Jesus. And you know what you see? When you see Jesus, you see what he sees.

When you get your eyes on him, you see where his eyes are. His eyes are on those he wants in his kingdom.

His eyes are on the lost, the sheep without a shepherd. Those in your family, in your life, on your job, on your block, in your neighborhood, in your sphere of influence, in your little world.

God sees those in your world who need him. And if you look at him, then you'll see them too. The table gives us common direction to proclaim his death until he comes again.

[21:30] To point people to what he did. The table reunites us on our mission for Christ. The table points us forward.

Not backward. Not to regret. Not to a place of shame. Not to isolation. But forward together. That's how a church moves into a new year.

Not pretending that we've arrived. Not shaming where we've been. But locking arms around where Jesus is leading us next. Together. Let's go forward. It asks, are you willing to walk with Jesus from here?

From wherever you are, are you now willing to link arms with Jesus and link arms together and say, let's follow him? Christian life isn't about arriving spotless.

It's about staying pointed toward Jesus, the one who is worthy. So, today, this table is not about resolving everything that's wrong in your life.

[22:37] It's not about remembering all the bad you've done, all the good you've done. It's about remembering Christ and what he did, what he made right.

So, as you take the bread and the cup today, let me challenge you to do these three things.

Number one, receive God's grace. Number two, release your shame. And number three, recommit your direction to following Jesus.

I don't want you to take offense at that. I want you to sit back and think, what makes you think I haven't been following Jesus? Listen, every time I hear that challenge, I need to examine my heart and say, God, there's no way that every area of my heart, my life, is committed to you.

Show me where I can recommit myself. Maybe I've gotten selfish. Maybe I've gotten self-centered in certain areas. Maybe I've gotten hard or closed off.

Maybe I've gotten comfortable. Whatever it is, God, show me so I can recommit my direction to you. Why? Because everything around you is fighting against that.

[23:53] Your flesh, the devil himself, the world around us is striving and working overtime to pull some part of you away from Jesus and onto anything else.

So, we need these. We need these moments to come together individually in our hearts, but then together as a church to say we recommit.

We receive the grace that God so freely offers every new day. We release the shame from who we know we are when we're honest about ourselves.

And we recommit our direction together to following Jesus. It's not about perfection. It's about direction. If you're tired, come to Jesus.

If you're unsure, come to Jesus. If you've stumbled, but you're still following him, then come to Jesus. Sit at his table. We're going to observe this together in just a moment.

[24:55] This table is for people in process. People who know the way forward is not about trying harder. It's about trusting more deeply.

So, this table reminds us to whom we belong. I invite you this morning to remain in your seat, put in your heart, come to the table.

Come to the table. Receive the bread as Christ's body. Receive the juice, remembering his blood.

Come to it honestly. Being fully honest about who you are, where you are. Look to Jesus clearly.

And leave together moving in the same direction.

Would you pray with me now? God, right now I pray that we would do those three things. We would approach your table honestly. That we would open our eyes and see ourselves clearly, but see you

clearly.

[26:06] And we would leave today moving in the same direction. We're not always going to agree on everything all the time. We're going to be coming from different perspectives and you want that.

But we can be moving toward you together. I pray that that's what you would teach us as we ready ourselves to receive the Lord's table today.

I'm going to ask the deacons to come forward. Would you keep your heads bowed and your eyes closed for just a moment? Gentlemen, you can distribute the trays and in just a moment, I'll release you to distribute the elements.

Let me ask you a couple questions while our heads are bowed. Music's going to start playing in just a moment.

We're going to read again this account. You're going to have the opportunity to hold a cracker and a cup of juice in your hand. And there's nothing special or particularly holy about those items, but it's what they signify.

[27:21] It's what they remind us of. It's what they represent. And with churches all across the ages, with churches all around this world, we get to do this jointly in our pursuit of our Savior.

So how do we get ready for this? First of all, would you ask yourself this question? Am I a child of God? At some point in my life, have I placed my faith in Jesus and Jesus alone?

I'm not trusting my good works to get me right with God, to earn my forgiveness. I'm not trusting my church attendance. I'm not trusting my status.

I'm not trusting anything other than God's grace given to me on the cross. God's power proven through his resurrection of his son.

So if that's not your testimony, then I invite you to make it that today. And I don't want to give you an opportunity.

[28:30] I don't want you to leave here without having the opportunity to turn to Jesus today in faith so while people's heads are bowed I'm going to ask you that question if today is the day you need to become right with God and place all your faith in him to forgive your sins would you slip your hand up now and I'd love to talk with you when we're done here thank you for the rest of us would you receive this grace would you release this shame would you recommit your direction to following Jesus maybe it's something in your heart maybe it's something that as a family you need to unite around maybe you need to sit the kids down and talk tonight before everybody goes to bed and say we're going to make God we're going to make Jesus a bigger part of our life we're going to be intentional about that we're going to start praying together whatever it is to recommit our direction to following the Savior God we ask all this in your name by your grace through your strength it's in Jesus name we pray amen the deacons are going to distribute the elements now when you receive the bread and the juice would you hold on to them and together in a moment we'll read from the scriptures one of our deacons will lead us in prayer and then we'll take the bread first and then the cup

I want to remind you this is for you don't have to be a member of this church but we ask that you know in your heart that you are one of God's children you've placed your faith in Him for forgiveness of your sins and that we welcome you to join us in observing the Lord's Supper today as you can hear Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[32:44] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[35:15] Thank you. As a church, pray that we just put aside selfish ambitions and just remembering the sacrifice you made of giving your son to die on the cross for our sins.

In his name we pray. Amen. Jesus said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Let's take the bread together. In the same way, after supper, he took the cup.

I'm going to ask Steve Ross to lead us in prayer, thanking God for his shed blood for us. Lord, we thank you for this day, for this time that we come before you to take of your Lord's Supper.

Lord, we ask that you would help us to examine ourselves and refocus on Jesus Christ. Lord, we come this morning in remembrance and in love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

[36:40] We ask that you bless this juice that we take. The juice that represents the blood of Jesus Christ in forgiveness of our sins.

Lord, we love you. And we pray these things in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Jesus said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Can we sing one line of amazing grace? How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me together. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found.

[38:02] Was blind, but now I see. I'm going to ask Greg Cox to close us in prayer.

Deacons, you are dismissed. Thank you for your service. And if you are a guest with us this morning, I want to thank you again for being here. I'd love to meet you. My wife and I will be in the lobby right after the service. But thank you for worshiping with us today.

We'll see you Wednesday. Don't forget. Let us pray. Dear Father, we just give you thanks, adoration, and praise for all that you do in our life.

For all that you have provided day by day. But especially this morning as we reflect on the gift of our Savior. We again thank you for your great love for us.

We ask that your provision would continue. Your mercy would exceed in our lives. That you will guide our path. Help us to walk in faith and commitment as servants in your kingdom.

[39:14] Dismiss us with your grace and mercy. We'll give you thanks and praise. It's in your name we ask it. Amen.