

# The Lords Table

by Todd Atkinson

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*This sermon focuses on the significance of the Lord's Table, also known as Communion, as a means through which God's invisible grace, power, and presence are conveyed through visible and physical elements. It emphasizes the importance of understanding, faith, and encounter in relation to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Table, highlighting how Jesus, as the primary sacrament, wanted to interact with humanity in a tangible way. The sermon encourages a deeper understanding and expectation when approaching these sacraments, leading to a higher level of encounter with God's grace and power.*

**Scripture:** John 6:35, 1 Corinthians 11:23, Acts 2:38, John 1:14, 1 Timothy 1:17, Mark 6:5, Acts 5:15, Acts 19:11, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Colossians 2:12, Luke 22:19

**Topics:** "Significance of Communion", "Encountering God's Grace"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Nice to be back with you. I have not been away, but I just felt like the Affliction Series, other members of our team, to run that. And now they'll let me back, and I get to preach through Lent.

Well, with Ash Wednesday this past week, we began the season of Lent. And that season will culminate on Good Friday and on Easter Sunday. And so I want to preach through this season of Lent a new series on a particular subject.

And I want to teach on the Lord's Table, also known as Communion. It's the Lord's Table because the Lord instituted it. It's called Communion because it's where we share our deepest communing with him and with one another.

It's also called the Eucharist because in its beginnings, Jesus took bread and gave thanks. And so the Eucharist comes from the word for thanksgiving and recalls this pivotal moment where Jesus gave thanks for the bread. And something unlocked and it multiplied there.

Something supernatural occurred. And it's an ideal series for this time because it was on the eve of Jesus' death that he initiated this practice. It was with his death in mind.

And he wasn't only preparing his people, his disciples, for his death. But through the Lord's Table, he was preparing them for life after death. He was preparing them for what does it look like to enjoy him after his death.

And to look back to his death and to keep it pivotal. Which is why he said, do this in remembrance of me. And so I think it's just an ideal time as we prepare.

He used this table to prepare people for his death and life after his death. As we prepare for Good Friday, I think it would make an ideal time of preparation for us. The last six weeks or so, we've been running a series called Affliction.

It's breaking down the gospel into its simplest expressions. So that whether someone is a seasoned veteran of church, or someone who was in church their very first Sunday, or their very first month, that they would be able to understand what Jesus has for you. So I want to carry on in this spirit of that series and try to teach this in a way, hopefully.

That whether you've been around for a long time, it might help you. But also whether you're very new to church, and new to this language. What are they talking about? I want you to feel like it was meant for you, if you're new.

And that it's accessible. There's something for you to gain and to take home by it. So let's look at Jesus.

That's why we're together today. When we look at the life of Jesus, there is something stunning that we come to understand about God. And something that we understand about the way God does things.

The way God works in our lives. And the way that we can receive that and interact with Him. And it's this.

That although God is invisible, you can't see Him, that He is nevertheless exceedingly real. And though you can't see Him, He has chosen to come to you, and to visit you, and to give you His grace and goodness and power through things that you can see. And through things that you can touch.

1 Timothy 1, verse 17. Paul says, Now unto the King, unto the King of the ages, He is immortal, He is invisible, He is the only wise God. So, this word invisible.

God is invisible. Now, He's not quite invisible like the invisible man is invisible. Because, if there was something, I guess like the invisible man, if I understand the plot quite right, He's still a man, and He's still generally the shape and size of a man, He's just a man you can't see.

So God's not invisible in that sense, He's invisible in the sense that there's too much of Him to be confined to a human body. That it would be a limiting factor. So if I invite Corey Hunt to come and stand here, if he's here, he can't be there.

Now, he looks at me with a kind of like, maybe he's got super powers. And so, he might be, I haven't figured that out yet. Under normal circumstances, living in a human body is a limiting factor.

It exposes you to our world in which we live, you're exposed to physical infirmities, a physical body gets tired, so it requires rest and sleep and replenishment, you can only be in one place at one time, you can't

live in all the ages, etc. And so God, by His very nature, can't be limited, unless He limits Himself. So He's invisible.

So how do you relate to someone you can't see? The old phone commercial, reach out and touch someone, how do you touch him? How do you come in contact with him? How do you receive what he has? And I want to talk about one of those ways today. And it's this, that although you can't see Him, and although He is invisible, He has chosen to come to people in ways that are very visible and are very physical. So when we study the life of Jesus, we see pictures like this, how that He would walk our earth, and He would heal people, but most customarily, the way He would heal people was to reach out and touch His hand on someone.

He would lay hands on someone, and they would be healed. So consider that for a minute, why did He have to touch them? So human beings, by nature, are quite tactile. And that's a good thing.

And when we touch someone, there's lots of, maybe, messages we're trying to send. So if someone was sad, a hug communicates something. It might say, I'm sorry.

Or, I would hope to comfort you. Sometimes someone might be walking past you, and you might quickly just reach out and just touch their elbow. It's a way of saying, I know you're in a hurry, I just wanted you to know I noticed you.

So touch says a lot of things. It might say, I'm here for you. I like you.

I like that we have a connection. I'm sorry you're having a rough day. Is there something I can do to help? Touch says a lot of things.

But when Jesus was confronted with people of serious need, and He reached out and touched them, there's a lot more going on there than, I think you're a good person. There's a lot more going on there than, can I give you a hug. When He touched someone, He was forming a connection between heaven and earth.

There was something that you couldn't see, that was being transmitted through something you could see. And that is, God's healing power was coming. You can't see His power.

So most of the times He prayed for people to be healed, there wasn't lightning in the sky. There wasn't electrical sounds in the air. You actually couldn't see healing power, but you could see His hand.

And you knew when that hand was coming your way, a connection was going to be formed between you and God. A connection was formed between heaven and earth. And God's power came through His hands.

How do we know when you can't see power? Because there's an entire chronicle of one person after another person after another person that was healed, that received a miracle, and experienced the supernatural power of heaven through the laying on of hands. And so these phrases are common in the Bible. Jesus laid His hand on him, and he was healed.

In one instance, He laid His hand on a dead person. He laid His hands on her, and she came to life. Wow! So, at the end of our services, just to explain, you're new, why do they pray for people? And why does someone maybe gently put a hand on my shoulder when they pray for me? So a couple things about that.

First of all, if you're the one praying, it's probably good if there's someone you don't recognize, you should ask permission. Unless there may be a little permission granted in coming forward. But still, if you don't know them, you should say, would you mind if I put a hand gently on your shoulder? Because in case they think, well, I go to church, but they paw on me a lot.

They can't keep their hands off me there. Not quite the reputation we want to get. So if it's maybe someone new, you could just ask that.

But if you're the one up here praying, you need to start thinking about this in a different way. Is that there's a time to say, hey, I love you, I'm connected to you, I'm sorry you're hurting. Send all those messages.

But don't miss the bigger message. Do you have faith that you are a sacrament of God? That you're the visible means, you're the physical means through which God's invisible grace and power is going to flow to that person, and that when you reach out your hand and touch them, that God is wanting through you to make a connection between heaven and earth. Because if you can begin to get that, your faith can apprehend that, you will see more things happen when you pray.

Faith. And understand something called the sacramental principle, that the church is a sacrament. We're the physical means that now Jesus transmits his invisible power.

So Jesus laid hands on people, and the most dynamic stuff happened. Mark chapter 6, he prayed for people, and it says this, he anointed them with oil. Oil.

Another physical substance. It says, and they were all cured. So oil.

If there's many reasons why we might touch someone, there's also many reasons why we might use oil. So you could use it as a moisturizer. So if someone comes forward and you notice that their forehead's a little dry, we do live in southern Alberta, buff them up a little.

Do not do that. They will never come back to our church. Their cuticles are a little dry, just take a little look there.

So it could, yeah, it could be, oil can be used in a variety of purposes. It could be used as a moisturizer, it could be used as a perfume. Okay, we won't go there.

Do not be spraying oil on people. Other cosmetic purposes, it can be used as a food preparation. We cook with oil.

So why was Jesus putting oil on people? Basting them like chickens? Because in the Old Testament, oil was given to God. Special, expensive, fragrant oils were offered to God. And they were given to Him that they might be used for His purposes and His purposes alone.

So that through that very physical means, that He might convey or transmit His very invisible power. And so right from the beginning, Jesus, later on the disciples, and it became the practice of the church to anoint with oils that had been blessed or consecrated or given to God. So again, that's what these wee vials are for.

If you're new to church, these things need explaining. That's what they're for. So if someone prays for you, maybe you come forward for a blessing at the end.

We're following in footsteps that Jesus Himself made. And we're asking that His invisible power and other invisible things, His love for you, you can't see love. His kindness, you can't see grace or kindness.

But everything that He has for you that you can't see, that it would come to you through ways that you can see. Many, many other instances of this in Scripture. Some of them unusual ones.

On one occasion, Jesus actually made saliva. If I see any people at our altar doing that, you will have some explaining to do. And we'll judge by the fruit.

If the person is healed, I'll say nothing. As long as you use modest amounts. So Jesus actually made saliva at one point.

Maybe He didn't have oil. Who knows? When you are that full of God, even His saliva was anointed. And put it in a man's eyes, and a blind man's eyes sprung open.

Healing power. You can't see it. It came through something you could see and touch and feel.

On another occasion, He made mud. Same thing came to a blind man who could not see. Made a paste out of mud.

Smear it on the man's eyes. Which is a profound truth. The man already couldn't see.

Now He puts another layer there. There's many truths. I love preaching for that text.

But I'll give you a little hint. Sometimes when you're following God, sometimes things get muddier before they get clearer. Very important truth.

En route, so He could see, things had to get muddier first. And it was okay. So if you're going through a patch where things don't seem clear, they seem kind of muddy, you might be in the very center of God's will.

And don't know it. Makes a paste out of mud. You could see it.

And it just shows how He could take anything. He could take anything and make it holy. He could take the dust right out of the ground.

And when He prayed for it, and when He touched it, and when He employed it in His services, even mud could become a sacramental. Even mud could become something that He could use for healing. Another instance, a lady came and touched the hem of His garment and had this deep thing.

She understood something about this principle because she wanted to touch God. And she reached through the crowd. If only to touch the hem of His garment.

Again, He's so God. So full of God's presence. Even His clothing was seeping with healing power.

And she reached out and just touched. But for her faith, she had to touch something physical. She had to touch something physical.

So at the end of our services and other occasions, sure, it's actually okay. You could sit in your chair and pray by yourself. We all do.

But there's also some other part of ourselves that faith looks like to reach out and touch God. There's a physical element. It's nice to have a physical person pray for you and lay hands on you and anoint you with oil because we know God works and has always worked through such means.

The apostles, as we go into later in the Bible, got this message. They, too, laid hands on people. They, too, anointed people with oil.

In Acts chapter 5, one day, people are getting healed even as Peter's shadow crosses them. His shadow crosses over sick people. So that's not a physical means, but it is a visible means.

And they get healed. On other occasions, there are so many demands upon the apostles. There are so many sick people that want them to come and pray that there is not enough hours in a day to do it.

So they actually begin to pray for pieces of cotton, handkerchiefs, ladies' aprons. Actually laid their hands on them and prayed that what Jesus had put inside of them would be transmitted, that invisible grace and power would be transmitted into a very physical means and they would go and then put the handkerchief on sick people and they would get healed. Crazy stories.

Now, of course it would be better if they could be there in person. And they very quickly understood this and so they began laying their hands on handkerchiefs. They began laying their hands on people who then went to pray for people.

They multiplied. So like an army, the church rose so that people were there praying. But at certain stages, there just wasn't enough people to go around.

But God still honored and worked through that means. That is not why I have that in my pocket. So don't ask for it.

So the Bible is literally full of instances. We could go on for hours, reveling in the stories where God just decided to work through very physical, through very visible means, and through them, divine power you couldn't see was conveyed. There's only one problem to that approach.

Remember the Old Testament? Naaman, a commander of the Syrian armies, literally an enemy of God's people, was completely ridden with leprosy. And he came to a prophet in Israel and said, I hear you could heal me. And the prophet gave him instructions, go to our river Jordan and dip there seven times.

And he was so mad. I'm not going to go dip in your muddy river, he said. Well then, go home with your leprosy.

So finally, someone convinced him, well, you should try this. Maybe this is the way their God works. And when he submitted to the words of the prophet, and he went to the river Jordan, very physical.

It's a river, you can see it. And he dipped seven times. The Bible says, when he came up the seventh time, the leprosy was completely gone from his skin.

His skin was as new as the skin of a baby. Brand new skin on his body. But that miracle occurred as he interacted with the very physical and visible means that God had appointed that day.

So we could go on and talk endless amounts of stories. The only risk with this approach is that it kind of misses the wood for the trees. Because you're isolating on stories, individual stories, as opposed to the

big picture, which is even truer and more important.

And the big picture is this. Not stories about Jesus. The big picture is, Jesus himself is the highest and greatest instance where the invisible God wanted to interact with our world, wanted to touch and bless and come in contact with us.

And so he wrapped himself in human flesh and literally walked amongst us. This is the most profound miracle. I mean, leprosy, being healed of it, that's a great miracle.

Brand new skin over your entire body. But it is nothing compared to the miracle that we call the Incarnation. It's where God stepped into a human body.

Why? So you could touch him. So here are the words of the apostles. This is John the Beloved.

John the Beloved, who one day was just reclining just so he could hear Jesus' heartbeat. He knew the heartbeat of God. And this is what he wrote.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard with our ears, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, that which was from the beginning came into a form. We could hear him with our ears, our very own ears. We could see him with our very eyes.

We could touch him with our very hands. This life was made manifest. In other words, the Son of God was alive long before the Incarnation, before he took a physical form, but he was made manifest.

The word made manifest means to become visible. To become apparent to us. So here's God, who wanted us to know just what he was like.

And so he became visible in the form of Jesus. Imagine this. So people could say, I touched God.

I looked into the face of God. And now every time I open my Bible and study the life of Jesus, I gaze into the face of God. So the individual stories are wonderful.

As long as we don't miss the big picture. God acts in this way. This is something profound and central to the way that God relates to our world.

A couple applications. One of them I just briefly touched upon. The next time you read your Bible, open it up and look at Jesus and realize this is God, became visible.

Literally, in the Old Testament, they were afraid to look at God because they felt they would die. So here, every day now, I open my Bible, I gaze on the face of God in the person of Jesus, and I'm amazed that I don't die. I can actually look at God because he took a form that I could look at him, called Jesus.

So I used to think it's kind of perplexing. How do I know about God? I know now. I just look at Jesus.

I know where to look. Second truth. Not only is God taking a human form, that's a sacrament.

Maybe, first of all, a couple definitions. I put a slide, just a few things that you might take home. So, traditionally, this language is called a sacrament.

What is a sacrament? A visible sign of an invisible grace. So when God puts something invisible through something that is visible, and the visible thing is actually a sign. So when there's someone who's willing to

lay hands on you and pray for you in Jesus' name, it's a sign that God wants to do something.

He wants to act on your behalf. A couple different applications. There's what's called the sacramental principle, which says that God makes himself present to us or available to us through physical means.

We've looked at many, many instances of them. But what is the primary sacrament? The sacrament above all other sacraments is the person of Jesus. A couple other take-homes.

At Jesus' ascension, the Bible says he was taken up from our sight until they couldn't see him any longer. You actually then couldn't see him. At which point, the church was birthed and we become the new sacrament of God.

So do you see yourself like this? You are now the physical means through which God wants to show his invisible grace and power. You, tonight we start a city-wide catechism class. It's deliberately, it's in the penny house, coffee house.

We want to be right downtown, in the center of our city. And we have people from all over our city coming who are new to the Christian faith and new to the church. I think God has hundreds and hundreds of things like that in store for us.

Because when his church realizes we are now a sacrament, that if we could get a hold of that and actually believe that, that we are the physical means through which now God wants to show his invisible grace and power, we would live differently in our city. I began this series by saying that I want to talk about the Lord's table. So let me just, that'll be enough for today.

Not only is Jesus the primary sacrament, but there are particular sacraments that he has instituted. The two chiefest of which are baptism and the Lord's table. I don't have time to teach in any depth on these today, but I want to leave it with you and I want to prepare you as we come to the Lord's table, is that Jesus instituted them.

They are more than just symbols. So notice we don't have a symbol here, but it would be easy to put one. What would be an appropriate symbol for the pulpit? I guess like an open Bible? Symbols are good things.

But what would happen if someone took the symbol off? Would the preaching fail? Because the symbol was removed. We have a symbol on top of our church. We have a cross with Christmas lights on, I think, before our time.

Isn't that what we have? We've got Christmas lights on. Now, there's no more symbol that I love in Christian faith than the cross. But if the wind blew it down, would we fail to be a church because we took the symbol down? No.

Symbols are great. What's taking place at baptism and at the Lord's table is more than merely symbolic. They are sacraments, which is a bit different than a symbol, meaning these are the two chief places that Jesus instituted that his invisible grace, his invisible power, and his invisible presence would come to his people through these very physical forms.

I can't wait to teach on this through the whole scripture. Jesus said this, I am the bread of life. He who believes in me will not die. Baptism in the form of water.

It's not just water. I can go home and have a bath if I want a bath. But when Jesus wants his grace and power and presence to come to us through the water, now you've got a Christian baptism.

Water can wash your body, but only the sacrament can wash your soul. Only Jesus coming through at physical needs and meeting you in it could ever wash your soul from the stain of sin. And he has ordained this table.

It's very physical. I can't wait to take you through all the passages. But through this very physical means, there is an invisible grace and presence and power that he wants to give to you.

And I'll end on this thought. What I found is this, my own experience and others. As your sense of understanding grows, so will your sense of faith.

And what will follow is your level of encounter will grow. As your understanding grows, for baptism, we do a lot of teaching on baptism. So people go into baptism with a much higher level of expectation than we would have 10 years ago.

What happens? That's way more powerful God encounters. They go in with a higher level of understanding, with a higher level of expectation, which is another word for faith, which means they have a way higher level of encounter on those days. The exact same thing too is the Lord's table.

We will grow. We're going to camp on this through Lent. Our sense of understanding will grow.

As our understanding grows, our sense of expectation will grow. We will come forward with a higher level of faith. We will engage with a higher level of faith.

And heaven will respond with a higher level of encounter. So God's got some very cool things. Let's spend a few moments in prayer.

Maybe you'd close your eyes. And what would you ask him for? Ask that he would do today what he did in the Gospels. Because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

So he hasn't changed. Ask that when we would lay hands on someone, something would happen through that physical means that God would be pleased to convey his wonderful love and kindness and power through that physical means. That when we anoint someone with oil.

In fact, we pray that we would be so full of God that when our shadow crosses people in this city, when we rub up against people, when we hang out with them at the penny, that we'd be so full of God that supernatural things would happen. Heavenly things. When people come in contact with his church.

Us. Maybe you haven't been baptized before because you didn't realize how important it was. That it is not a symbol.

I didn't get baptized for a few years after becoming a Christian because nobody ever explained to me how important it was. And I have zero interest in doing meaningless things. Maybe, maybe some of you'd come out to the penny tonight to learn about the road to baptism.

But for all of us, can we begin a journey today that will go on for the next few months and say, Jesus, teach us about your table. From your word, teach us about your table. Teach me how to come to it with expectation.

Teach me what I should expect. I want to commune with you. I want to encounter you.

I want to fellowship with you around your table. Teach me, Jesus. The very first table, the last supper, it was such an intimate occasion.

Lord, when I come to your table, I want it to be an intimate occasion between you and I. We normally do a corporate confession here. Just for today, I just want you to exercise faith and just confess in your hearts right now. This is unusual.

We normally do this out loud and a better way of doing it. By the nature of confession, it's meant to be out loud. That's what a confession is.

But I want us to get to grips with it. If through your week, you had accumulated debt, and every Sunday you come to church, Jesus wrote your debt off, you'd be pretty excited to get to church. If every week he goes, I'll take care of that debt.

I'll pay for that. That's what happens at communion. Every week I can confess my sins.

He forgives my debts as I forgive my debtors. I walk away every single time with a clean slate and a clear conscience. There is nothing like it.

I don't have to carry weight for my wrongdoings, which are many. I don't have to carry it for a long time or people's offenses to me. I don't have to carry them for a long time and be down.

I can offload them every single week. So what do you need to offload this morning? What do you need to say, Jesus, forgive me. Forgive me for my self-pity, which causes me to blame people around me.

Forgive me for my self-loathing, which causes me not to see you, see myself as you see me. Forgive me for letting anger get the better of me. Forgive me that when my heart is lonely, for looking at all the wrong places.

Forgive me that because I was rejected, I can now be quick to reject. Because I was rejected, I assume everybody is going to reject me, so I never get close to people. Forgive me that when truth is spoken over me, you're so invaluable.

Forgive me that I put all my walls up and I actually don't want to receive it. Forgive me when I am inhospitable to truth. Forgive me when I am ruled by fear instead of faith, by untrust instead of trust.

Forgive me when I know the right way to walk, and don't. Forgive me for any idolatries that have crept up in my heart, that are diluting my single-minded devotion to you. Forgive me where my heart is going cold or hard.

Now let him hear your prayer, if you truly pray to him. Let him take hardness out. Let him take fear away.

He's here by his Spirit. Take jealousy away. He's our Heavenly Father, and he is full of great mercy.

And he has promised the forgiveness of sins. Promised. To anyone who with sincere concern, heartfelt sorrow, and faith, true faith, turn to him.

God loves the real deal. May he have mercy on you. May he pardon and deliver you from all your sins through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now just think with me on the cross. Father, we give you thanks for yourself. Every day, but especially in this period of times.

And we remember how that on the night that he was handed over to suffering and to death and betrayal, that our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and he said, this is my body, which is given for you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance.

After supper, he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, drink this, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink this physical, visible cup, do it in remembrance of me, and believe that something invisible and spiritual and powerful will be conveyed to you. Holy Father, we offer you this bread and this cup.

We ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to come to us through this very physical means. Send your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these gifts that they may be unto us, the body and blood of man. His sacrament.

Meet with us. Commune with us. Let your presence come to us, to invite the servers to come.

As you come today, come with a higher sense of expectation. Whether it's for the bread and the chalice, or whether it is for a blessing,

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