

Taking Part in the Breaking of Bread Meaningfully

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing the presence of Jesus in our midst, especially during the breaking of bread, symbolizing the body and blood of Christ. It highlights the need for a clear conscience and earnest desire to fellowship with the Lord at the Lord's table. The message stresses the significance of examining oneself, having the right attitude towards sin, forgiving others, and understanding the unity of believers as one body in Christ.

Scripture: Luke 24:30, Luke 22:14, 1 Corinthians 11:24, 1 Corinthians 11:28, James 1:15, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Corinthians 10:16, Matthew 18:21, Romans 12:5

Topics: "Recognizing Christ's Presence", "Unity in Fellowship"

Description

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Transcript

There are two things I want to mention at the beginning as we come around the Lord's table. First is a verse in Luke chapter 24. If you turn with me there, please.

This is going to Luke 24. We read of the time when the two disciples walked with Jesus to Emmaus. And they did not know it was Jesus.

But they urged him to come in. We read in Luke 24 verse 29, they urged him to come into their house. They didn't know who he was.

And when he was at the table, verse 30, he took the bread. They had a breaking of bread, so it was just the two of them. They were probably a husband and a wife.

It was a family meeting. A husband and wife, two disciples walking to Emmaus. And Jesus with them when they entered the house.

And when he blessed and broke it and gave it to them, then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. When we come to the Lord's table, it is very possible that we don't recognize the presence of Jesus in our midst. We are aware of each other.

We maybe listen to a message. And the bread and the cup come along. And we faithfully and sincerely take part in it.

But these words are not written about us. We recognize him. So that's most important.

One of the wonderful things that happens to any Christian who is walking with a clear conscience is that the Holy Spirit reveals the presence of Jesus in his personal life. And especially when two or three are gathered together in his name. And we are more than two or three.

So my dear brothers and sisters, more than being aware of any other person in this room, I pray as we break bread together, and even before we break bread, that we will recognize that Jesus Christ our Lord is present here in the Holy Spirit. If our eyes were opened, we would see him in our midst. But we recognize him in our spirit that he is here.

What a beautiful word. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him as they broke bread. So let me encourage you when you break bread to pray a short prayer in your heart.

Lord, as you open the eyes of those that coupled in Emmaus long ago, open my eyes today that I will see you. And many times at the Lord's table I have said, Lord, please give me the bread from your hand. Give me the cup from your hand.

I want to take it straight from you. I want to have that relationship with you. The second verse I want to point out to you is Luke's Gospel chapter 22, when the first time they had the Lord's table.

And see how Jesus approaches it. He says in verse 14, Luke 22 verse 14, In the hour had come, he sat at the table and the apostles were with him. And he said to them, listen to these words.

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. And it was not just a Passover, it was the initiating of the breaking of bread. But listen to those words.

I have earnestly desired to have this fellowship with you. So that's the second question we can ask ourselves. Do you have an earnest desire to fellowship with the Lord around the Lord's table? I want to ask that question myself.

We've been busy during the day with so many activities. Good. None of them were simple.

God allows us to richly enjoy all things the Bible says. But then when we come around the Lord's table, we must have the same earnest desire that he has. Actually, we should have a greater desire for him to humble himself and say, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.

So that's the second thing. One, pray that our eyes will be opened if we recognize Jesus in our midst today. And secondly, that in our hearts there'll be an earnest desire through these symbols.

The bread is only a symbol, but it's a very meaningful symbol. The broken bread is a picture of his body broken for us. And the cup is a picture of his blood shed on the cross.

We can speak about it so lightly. But his blood was drained out on the cross. Once the soldier pierced him with a sword after he died, all the blood drained out from his body.

There was not a single drop of blood left in his body. And we know that from the fact that when he stood before his disciples after his resurrection, if you turn with me to Luke 24, he stood in their midst and said to them in Luke 24, when he appeared before them and he manifested the first day of the week, Luke chapter 24, they were surprised to see him. And he said to them in verse 39, see my hands and my feet, touch me and see, Luke 24, 39.

A spirit, I'm not a spirit. I've risen from the dead. And what do I have in my body now? Flesh and bones.

We have flesh, bones and blood in our body. But in his risen body, there was no blood. It was only flesh and bones.

Where did the blood go? It was all poured out on the cross for your sins and mine. That's what we symbolize here. We can take this so lightly.

There's a verse in the Old Testament which says the life of a man of the flesh is in the blood. When the blood is poured out, the entire life of a man goes out. And that's what he gave for our sins.

Then I want to turn to 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Corinthians 11 speaks here again about how the Lord broke the bread in verse 24. Luke 1 Corinthians 11, 24, saying this is my body.

In verse 25, this cup is a new covenant in my blood. And as often, verse 26, as often, this is one of those instances today. As you eat this bread and drink this cup, you know what we're doing? It says here, as often as you eat it and drink it, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It's a symbolic way. Just like in water baptism, when we go into the water, we're saying my old life is buried. We come out of the water saying I'm a new person now.

In the same way here, the symbolism is the Lord died for me. And that's looking back and looking forward. He's coming again for me.

There are two things mentioned there. The Lord's death that's behind us until he comes. That is in the future.

We are in between. So we are proclaiming the death of Christ as something we value, thankful for. Because that's the only way we can have fellowship with God.

And we know that that is only until he comes, we look forward to his coming. So it says in verse 28, let a man examine himself and eat the bread and drink the cup. So what do I have to examine myself? Well, I asked myself, what did he die for? He died for my sins.

And if I have a wrong attitude towards sin, that's what I need to examine myself. As we take part in the Lord's table. Do I have the right attitude towards sin? Do I see sin? Any sin? Any sin? The way you speak to somebody.

Your attitude towards someone. Any unrighteousness in any area of your life. Anybody you have not forgiven.

Anybody you hurt. You have not asked forgiveness from. Those are all wrong attitudes to sin.

Let a man examine himself. You don't have to examine others. Thank God.

There's only one person in the world I can examine. That's myself. I can't even examine my wife.

I don't know her heart. I don't know any of your hearts. But I know my heart clearly.

What is my attitude to sin? Do I hate it? Because it killed my savior. I hate sin because. I hate my sin because my sin killed my savior.

It killed him. It drained him of his blood. I can't fool around with it anymore.

In my ignorant foolish days I fooled around with sin. Careless about my speech. Careless about my thoughts.

Careless about my attitudes to other people. Hoping calamity would strike those who hurt me instead of forgiving them. Like Jesus did on the cross.

Father forgive them for they don't know what they do. I didn't have that attitude towards those who hurt me. I hoped they'd suffer for hurting me.

But it's gone. Thank God it's gone. I can forgive them now.

Have you forgiven? You know Jesus once said. It is impossible but offenses will come. Let me paraphrase that.

As long as you live on this earth. Somebody or the other will hurt you. In some way.

Maybe in words or in actions. Maybe in your own home. Maybe your neighbor.

Maybe your relative. As long as you live offenses will come. Jesus said.

But we must not sin. That's why he's given us the Holy Spirit. You say it's so difficult.

I know. But do you know that Jesus struggled against sin? Struggled against temptation? There's nothing wrong in that. We read in Hebrews in chapter 5. You know how Jesus overcame temptation? In the.

Three temptations in the wilderness that are described. You know where the devil came and tempted. It was very easy.

One word. The devil went away. Another word.

The devil went away. Third. One word.

The devil went away. But there were so many other temptations that came to him. Throughout his 33 years in his mind.

In his attitude. Just like we are tempted. The Bible says he was tempted exactly like us.

Hebrews 4.15. He was tempted in every single point. Exactly like you and me. How are you tempted? Jesus was tempted in the same way.

And you know how he overcame? He could never have overcome. If he had a casual attitude towards any sin. It says in verse 7 of chapter 5. The same subject.

When he was here in his flesh. He prayed with loud crying and tears. Have you ever prayed with loud crying and tears? I mean, you probably pray like that if somebody in your family is sick or dying or something like that.

But do you pray with loud crying and tears that I don't want to sin in my life, Lord? Jesus was praying with loud crying and tears. To what? For what? It's not because he lost any money. It's not because somebody called him the devil.

No, no, no. He was praying that he may not sin. And you say, you mean Jesus also had to pray like that to avoid sin? Certainly, because he was made like us.

There are two mistakes that people have made in Christendom. There's some people who made Jesus God to such an extent that he's not a man. That means he could never be tempted.

God cannot be tempted. Then it's Jesus' play acting when it says he was tempted. He was not really tempted.

He was just acting. That's an insult to say Jesus was acting. He was really tempted.

But he could not be really tempted if he had not taken on the form of a man 100%. Did he have to struggle against temptation? Sure. Do you have to struggle against temptation? Not all of them.

Some temptation, you're not tempted to murder, are you? There's no struggle there, but some other temptations you are. So for Jesus also, there was some temptation he had to struggle. What did he do when he struggled? It says he prayed with loud crying and tears to the only one who was able to save him from spiritual death, which is a result of sin.

And his prayers were heard because he was so God-fearing. That's what we remember when we come to the Lord's table, the attitude Jesus had towards sin. Now, many people, when they read that verse, they think they must be referring to his physical death.

But he was praying, Oh, Father, don't let me die. It's true in Gethsemane. He said, Let this cup pass from me.

But he said, Not my will, but thine. But here is a prayer. Read the rest of that sentence.

He was heard. He was heard means he was saved from death, which death? Not physical death. He was not saved from physical death.

So we know that's not what he was praying for. The Bible says, Lust, when it is conceived, produces sin, James 1. And sin, when it is finished, produces death. That's in James 1. The end result of sin is death.

And Jesus didn't even want to have the smell of that death in him. He prayed, Father, save me from that smell of death, which is in sin. And he was heard.

He was heard means he never sinned. And so, let a man examine himself, it says in 1 Corinthians 11, we are coming to take part in the symbols of Christ having paid the ultimate price, he never sinned, and to

save us. So I see that what I need to examine myself is not, do I have the same attitude as Jesus had? Let me take the time to get there.

But are you longing, ask yourself, am I longing to have the same attitude to sin that Jesus had? I can't say today that I have the same attitude to sin that Jesus had. I wish I had. But I haven't got there yet.

But I tell you, it's a long way that I've come from where I was 45 years ago when God filled me with the Spirit and began to show me some of these things. Longing to be free from sin has increased a hundredfold, a thousandfold. But I know it's still a long way to go to become 100% like Jesus, but I'm pressing on.

So that's, I want to encourage you to examine yourself. Don't worry about your neighbor, don't worry about your husband or wife or anybody else. You, you cannot examine another person, you can only examine yourself.

Do I have, do I have a longing to have the same attitude to sin that Jesus had? Because that's what this table symbolizes. A body broken and a bloodshed for my sin. And it says here further that if I don't have that attitude and I come so lightly to the Lord's table as a ritual, as perhaps many of us have done for so many years, I know I did it in blindness for so many years, then verse 29, I'm eating and drinking judgment to myself.

Why? Because my attitude to sin is not serious. These things are not taught in most churches. And that's why I say most churches are full of people who sin day and night in their thoughts, in their words, at home, in their office, on the roads, when they're driving, all the time.

And then they come next Sunday and break bread. Oh, what a shock they'll get when Christ comes again. And they find they're outside the kingdom.

They're not even anywhere near. And all the songs they sing and all the other professions that made of Christianity were hollow. There's one more thing I want to say.

And that is, see the cross has got two arms, a vertical and horizontal. The vertical shows we have sinned against God. The horizontal shows we have sinned against our fellow human beings.

And we have to repent of both. And when we come together like this, we are saying, I have fellowship with God because I've confessed all my sins vertically. I also have fellowship with my fellow believers here who are breaking bread with me.

That's the horizontal arm of the cross. There is no cross without these two arms. So that's the other thing you need to ask yourself.

Are you in fellowship with everybody sitting here? Do you have a grudge against somebody? Well, it takes less than a minute to confess it to God in your mind right now and say, Lord, forgive me. Cleanse me. Help me to have the right attitude and to preserve that right attitude.

Is there somebody who did something which you haven't forgiven? Maybe somebody who did or said something today that you're upset about. We've had very close fellowship with one another today. Is there something that disturbed you? Have you confessed it to the Lord and forgiven? Never mind if the other person did something wrong.

If that person does not have the level of light that you have, God may not even count it against him. But he'll count it against you if you don't forgive him. You know, whenever people sin against me, I say, Lord, perhaps he's not at my spiritual level.

He probably doesn't even see it as sin. It's like, you know, a student in second grade. A 10th grade student will look at him and say, well, he doesn't know how to work out that math problem.

But I don't blame him because he's not at my level. I'm in 10th grade. He's in second grade.

That's what's helped me to be very merciful to people who've done wrong to me. I say, probably they don't see it. Maybe they're in the kindergarten.

By the grace of God, he's brought me to 10th grade or 11th grade. And I understand so many things which that poor man doesn't understand. I want to be merciful to him.

It's a sin for me, but it's not a sin for him. Because he doesn't see it. I mean, if a kindergarten student cannot solve an algebra or trigonometric problem, that's not serious.

He hasn't studied it. It's exactly like that with sin. All of us are at different levels.

And to be merciful to others means, I assume, that they are at a lower level of understanding of what sin is than I am. To me, it is sin. To him, it is not.

He's in the kindergarten or he's in the first grade. Algebra is too tough for him. But I understand it.

So, don't say, because I know it's sin, he must be knowing it's sin, or she must be knowing it's sin. No! God's given you more light. Be thankful.

Be merciful. 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16. The cup of blessing which we bless is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ. It's not the body of Christ, like some people teach. It is a fellowship in the body of Christ.

It's not the blood of Christ, like some people teach. It's a fellowship in the blood of Christ. Then it says, there is one bread, and we who are many, when we take part of that one bread, you know what we are saying? Not only that Jesus died for us, but we, verse 17, are one body.

He takes the bread, I take the bread, she takes the bread, I take the bread. We are one body. And that also we have to ask ourselves, do I recognize that? Do you look down on anybody here? Not as smart as you, not as clever as you, not as spiritual as you perhaps.

One body. If there is a weak member in your physical body, say my little finger is hurt, and it's a little weak, there's no part of my body that despises this. No.

Because it's my finger. I'll do everything to make sure that finger comes back to normal. My dear brothers and sisters, it's not like this in most of Christendom.

Because most of Christendom doesn't have a clue about one body of Christ. But that is what we teach in our church. And it won't happen overnight.

We've got to start in the kindergarten and work all the way to get our PhD. Every one of you can do it. I tremendously appreciate a little kid, 6 years old, in the kindergarten, and you ask him, what are you doing? He says, I'm working towards a PhD.

Kindergarten, 6 year old kid. Isn't that great? I'd be excited if a kid, this boy, he says, I know it's a long way to get there, but I'm going to get there. We should have that attitude towards Lord, I haven't yet understood what the body of Christ is.

That I have to deny myself. Every part of this body, human body, denies itself for the sake of others. The other part of the body.

It may not deny itself for your body, but it will deny itself for this body. Every part of this body. And if we recognize that we have one body in Christ, it makes a tremendous difference.

And I want to say that the breaking of bread, according to this verse, is not only a testimony of our fellowship with God and being free from conscious sin, it's also a testimony that we are breaking one bread and we are one body in Christ. That's why it says, let a man examine himself. Great verse in 1 Corinthians 11.

Not his neighbor. Nobody else. I don't have to examine my wife or anybody else.

You don't have to examine your husband. Let everyone examine himself or self and take part. So to recoup all that I said today, let's pray that our eyes will be open and that we will recognize him and that as he earnestly desires to be with us today, we will earnestly desire to fellowship with him.

That we recognize that the blood, the body and the bread and the cup symbolize a life that was poured out to death to fight against sin. My sin, your sin and the other is our recognizing that we are one body when we break bread. Even if you haven't got all that in your mind, you can meditate on it so that each time you break bread from now on, starting with today, all these truths that you've heard become more and more real.

It has to be and it has changed my life. I believe it will change your life. This is not an empty ritual.

For many people, it is an empty ritual, but not for me. Their eyes were open in the breaking of bread. And many times I prayed, Lord, as I break bread today, let my eyes be open that I recognize you.

I see you as you are. Pray that prayer with me.

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