

The Meaning of the Lord's Table

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following scripture and having a serious attitude towards sin when breaking bread, and highlights the significance of this act as a fellowship in the body and blood of Christ.

Duration: 26:16

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23

Topics: "The Lord's Table", "Obedience to God's Word"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Table, urging believers to adhere strictly to biblical instructions when partaking in communion. He draws parallels from Moses' obedience in constructing the tabernacle, highlighting that God's glory fills those who follow His word precisely. Poonen stresses the importance of self-examination before communion, warning against taking part without a sincere desire to turn from sin. He also discusses the exclusivity of the Lord's Table, noting that it is not open to everyone but rather to those committed to Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the bread and wine, which symbolize Christ's sacrifice and our unity as believers.

Transcript

When we come to something like breaking bread or the Lord's table, we need to do it exactly like scripture has taught it. And in everything, if we seek to follow the word of God, then we can be sure God's blessing is upon it. I love that Old Testament passage in Exodus and chapter 40, which reads like this.

After Moses had completed the tabernacle in chapter 39 and 40, about 18 times it says that Moses did exactly as the Lord commanded. And at the end of that, the last time is in verse, chapter 40, verse 32, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. That appears about 18 times in verses 39 and 40.

And it was thus that Moses, verse 33, finished the work and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, verse 34, teaching us that God's glory fills us when we do things exactly according to his word. Moses was a very clever man, but he didn't bring his bright ideas into doing God's work. He didn't modify the plan of the tabernacle according to the structure of the pyramids that he had seen built in Egypt.

No, those were impressive things. The tabernacle was very simple. God's work is very simple on the outside.

The glory is on the inside. And so when it comes to the breaking of bread also, we have to humbly acknowledge we don't know the right way to do it. We don't know the right way to do anything to please God unless he reveals it to us.

We can be busy like Martha doing so many things and finally the Lord will say, you wasted your time. You didn't do it. But if like Mary, we can sit at his feet and listen and say, Lord, how do you want me to do it? Thy will be done on earth in our church exactly as it is done in heaven.

The angels wait on God and say, what do you want us to do? And God says, do this. So when it comes to the Lord's table, we read, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 11, where instruction is given concerning this. Some people say, oh, these are the words of Paul.

Hang on. Jesus said before he went up to heaven, he said, there are many things I want to say to you, but you can't understand them now. That is the last night after he had taught them for three and a half years, he tells them in John 16, verse 12, there are still many more things I want to say to you, but you can't understand them now because you don't have the Holy Spirit in you.

And in a few days, you'll be filled with the Holy Spirit. And when the spirit of truth has come, John 16, 13, he will lead you into all the truth. So the fulfillment of John 16, 12 and 13 is the epistles.

We can say that is Jesus speaking again, the things that he could not speak when he was on earth, because people didn't have the Holy Spirit to understand it. For example, Jesus never spoke about building the body of Christ. Never.

He just said, I'll build my church. But then he said, I'm going to tell you many more things about it, which you can't understand now, but when the Holy Spirit has come, he'll teach you all things. And that's exactly what happened after the Holy Spirit came.

And so the epistles are Jesus continuing to speak through Paul and Peter and John and James and Jude, etc. So when you read in 1 Corinthians 11, remember, this is what the Holy Spirit, which is the same as Jesus, another comforter, telling us. Paul says, I received from the Lord, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he says, the Lord Jesus in the night when he was betrayed.

This is 1 Corinthians 11, 23. 1 Corinthians 11, 23. In the night he was betrayed, he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it.

One of the first things I want you to notice there is in the night when he was betrayed and the person who betrayed him was sitting there at the table. Good question is, did Judas Iscariot partake of the breaking of bread or not? He did. Jesus himself gave it.

He said, the one to whom I give this bread is the one who's going to betray me. And so did Judas, did Jesus wash Judas Iscariot's feet? Yes. You read in John 13 very clearly.

He left after the washing of feet. Does Jesus wash the feet of people who betray him? Sure. Do we love those who betray us? Yes.

But Jesus didn't invite everybody in the town to the breaking of bread. He didn't stand in the multitude and say, hey, fellas, we're going to have breaking of bread today. Please come, anybody who wants to come.

That's how many churches do it today. I'm sorry, we don't do it like that. Jesus called a few people for the breaking of bread.

It was by invitation. If somebody else walked into that door that day when Jesus was sitting with his 12 disciples, Jesus would have said, I'm sorry, please leave us alone because we are having a private meeting. That's the first thing we need to see.

We want to follow Jesus exactly. So I have no hesitation in telling somebody at the door, excuse us, please come for our regular services, but we're having a private meeting now. That's the first thing.

And that's the reason why right from the beginning, we seek to limit it to those who expressed by action and by word, their commitment to this church. There are many churches where people gather to break bread, but there is a commitment required, which I'll come to in a moment. So the first thing I want to say is it was not open to everybody.

So we do not open it to everybody. But the other thing we learned here is that even though it was not open to anybody, one betrayers crept in who was so bad that Jesus said it was better he was not even born. So 8% of the crowd were crooks.

You know what I mean by 8%, one out of 12, it's just mathematics. So you have a church of a hundred believers, you can have eight people at least who are crooks, who are not really committed. Then you've got a church as good as Jesus' church.

But I don't think we can make it that good. Our percentage may be a higher percentage of people who are not serious, maybe 15%, 20%, 25%. I don't think I've ever been to any church where everyone who breaks bread is serious about it.

And I don't believe all of you sitting here are serious about it either, because our church is not better than Jesus' church, which had an 8% crook rate in it. So what I'm saying is just because you break bread, don't imagine that you're part of Jesus' church. Even if Judas is carried, imagine that it was not true.

That depends on your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We do our best to filter out, but we make mistakes. We are human.

So it's possible there are people sitting here whom God may not see as fit to break bread, because there's something wrong in their life. They have not surrendered themselves to Christ, or they've got some unforgiven grudge against somebody. God only knows, and you know.

Or they've got somebody whom they've not gone and asked forgiveness from, whom they hurt and injured. Some debt, they're not serious about repaying, not even attempting to repay. And some crookedness, they're not walking in the light.

So that's the second thing I want to say, that even in that first breaking of bread, there was one man, 8% of that crowd, that was not, that should not have been there. But Jesus loved them. We pass the bread to you.

Jesus passed the bread to Judas Iscariot. Jesus was not responsible. Judas was responsible.

We're not responsible. We pass the bread to you. You're responsible.

The Bible says, let a man examine himself. Verse 29, a man must examine himself. We're not here to examine you, because we can see less than 1% of your life.

Even if he saw all your external life, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, even that will be only 10%. The whole of your, 90% of your inner thoughts, attitudes, motives, we don't know. But we don't even see that.

We see you occasionally here on Sunday, 1% or less of your life. How can we evaluate you on the basis of 1%? 99%, you know, and God knows. That's why it says, let a man examine himself.

Even his wife does not. Your wife doesn't know you fully. Your husband doesn't know you fully.

What sort of thoughts are going through your mind? Does your wife know? Does your husband know? No. So it says, let a man examine himself. What shall we examine ourselves about? What is the meaning of the Lord's table? Then we can understand.

Jesus said, this is my body. Do this in remembrance of me. We remember Jesus Christ himself.

Lord Jesus, you came to this earth in a flesh and died on the cross for me. You lived that perfect life and died for me, for my sin. You know, like we sing in that song, which we just sang.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Did he die for me who caused him so much pain, who pursued him to death? I don't know whether you pay attention when you sing these songs. In my early days as a Christian, it was a song I was very familiar with. I would just sing it and not even think about what I was singing.

But I've sort of trained myself to pay a little more attention now. And that struck me today as I was singing it. Who pursued him to death, died for me who caused his pain, for me who him to death pursued.

That means I was one of those Pharisees who said, crucify him, kill him. And you say, no, I've never seen myself like that. No wonder you don't love Jesus so much.

You haven't seen that you were the one who pursued Jesus to his death. You say, how? Because you kept on sinning. And even now, many of you haven't taken sin seriously.

That means you're pursuing him to his death. That's the meaning. Not only pursued him to death and you were that Roman soldier who said, nail him to the cross.

You know, my sin nailed him to the cross. Your sin nailed him to the cross. And if you are not serious to give up sin, serious, I don't mean you're falling, but you're serious to give it up.

In other words, every time you fall, you repent, come back to God immediately. Lord, I'm sorry I fell. Give me victory.

That means you're serious about giving up sin. Then you can say you have stopped pursuing Jesus to his death. But all the rest of you who take sin lightly, you are pursuing Jesus to his death.

You're nailing him to the cross and saying, you got to die. I don't want to do it anymore. I did it for so many years.

In the years when I took sin lightly, I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed because I crucified Jesus. I shouted, crucify him, crucify him.

Every time I sinned, I was saying, crucify him, crucify him. But I won't say it anymore. I pursued him and Lord, I pursued you to death and you died for me.

Amazing love. How can it be? And thou, my God, should die for me. That you should leave your father's throne above and empty yourself of everything but love for me, who wants to pursue you to death and bled for helpless me.

It's mercy all the way, immense and free. But praise God, it found me out at last. Dear brothers and sisters, pay attention to the words when you sing.

The songs themselves will become a blessing to you. They've been a blessing to me. You're missing so much when you just get taken up with the melody and the tune and rock your heads and all that.

You can do all that, but pay attention to the words. Musicians, great danger of not paying attention to the words, being taken up with the music, missing that, missing that and miss out completely. I don't want to miss out completely.

When I come for a church meeting, every minute I want to be in the presence of God, mean every word I say. Do this in remembrance of me. We remember him who died for us, gave his body to be broken and his blood so freely to be shed on the cross so that my sins can be forgiven so that the demands of justice of a holy God could be taken care of, dealt with.

Like he's singing that song on the cross, the wrath of God on my sin was satisfied. Satisfied means, okay, punishment has been paid. Jesus experienced three hours in hell.

Punishment is paid for my sin. Thank you, Lord. So, you know, if you come to the Lord's table without a serious attitude towards sin, sin in thought, word, the way you speak to your husband, the way you speak to your wife, if these things don't bother you, I'm not saying you got victory overnight, but do they bother you when you speak badly? You're crucifying Jesus, brother, sister.

It's meaningless. You're breaking bread. I'm not saying you shouldn't.

This is for sinners, but not for sinners who want to continue in their sin. I'm not asking you, have you got victory? I'm only asking you one question. Do you want to continue in the sin that you know is sin in your life? If you say yes, I would earnestly request you not to break bread.

But if you're the most defeated person here and you can sincerely say before God, I do not want to sin anymore, you're welcome to break bread. Those disciples around the Lord's table, they didn't have victory over sin. They were defeated.

Even at the table, they were arguing who is the greatest. Was that victory? No. Why did Jesus pass the bread around? Because he knew that these 11 at least had a desire for victory.

They didn't have the Holy Spirit. He had a desire for victory. That's what I'm asking you.

Do you have a desire to be free from sin? You're welcome to the Lord's table. Do you have a desire to be free from every sin in your life? Because even if you committed only one sin, Jesus would have had to die for you. One sin.

I often think like this. If I was the only sinner in a world of 7 billion people and I committed only one sin, Jesus would have to come all the way from heaven to die for me. Who'd kill him? I'd kill him because I'm the only sinner in the world.

I committed only one sin. See, that's how serious sin is. And we need to see it like that when we come to the Lord's table.

Do this in remembrance of me. Why did he die? He died for sin. Why did he shed his blood? And he said also, do it as often as you do it.

Drink it. Verse 25. In remembrance of me.

We must not change God's word to read like some people say. Do this once a week. Do you know that verse is never in scripture? Do it once a week.

It is added to scripture by people who don't have a respect for scripture. I have a tremendous respect for Jesus' word. And so I do not add to his word saying, do this once a week or do it once a month or do it.

But people say in the Acts of the Apostles, it says in chapter 20, verse 7, the first day of the week, they gathered together to break bread. It also says in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 and verse 46 that they broke bread every day. So which shall we do then? Shall we have a breaking of bread every day? The Acts of the Apostles has not given us for doctrine.

The Acts of the Apostles is a history book that tells us what they did. They did it every day in Acts 2, verse 46. They did it once a week in Acts 2, verse 7. They were obeying the commandment Jesus said, do this whenever you do it in remembrance of me.

So how often shall we do it? I would say as often as it is feasible and as frequently as it doesn't become a ritual for us. I believe I can say honestly before God that I walk with the Lord in a way that I can break bread every single day without it becoming a ritual, just like Acts 2, verse 46. But I don't think most believers are there.

I don't think most believers are even at that once a week level. It becomes a ritual. I've seen it for years.

I used to be in an assembly where they used to break bread every Sunday, and it was a ritual for most people. And I say, God save us from rituals and traditions. This is the thing that Jesus fought all his life against, traditions.

So that's why we do it once a month, first Sunday of the month. For some, it could still be a ritual. I hope not.

But we try to make it less frequent than once a week and less frequent than once a day so that it doesn't become a tradition. That's the main reason. That's why Jesus said, do it as often as you do it in remembrance of me.

I have no problem with three, four wholehearted believers if we were in some jungle breaking bread every day with them. No problem. But since most believers are not at that level, I feel we have to consider, and each church is in a different situation.

So that's why churches who follow a tradition which is not mentioned in scripture can get into a rut. We are flexible on it. I believe a church which is having a lot of conflict and it's affecting a lot of people, they should probably stop breaking bread for six months.

I've even suggested that in some of our churches. I say, till you sort this problem. I don't mean two, three husbands and wives quarreling.

That'll happen in every church. Forget them. I'm saying where there's a major conflict, maybe between the elders or maybe between many people in the church that is affecting the whole church, they shouldn't break bread because it's meaningless.

Because this is not only a testimony of our relationship with Christ and Christ's death. In 1 Corinthians 10, it also says, verse 16 and 17, 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16 and 17, the cup of blessing which we bless, isn't it a fellowship in the blood of Christ? It's not the blood of Christ like some churches teach. No, very clear here.

It's a fellowship. I'm testifying when I drink wine. It's a fellowship.

It's not the blood of Christ. You taste it. I know what blood tastes like.

And when I drink this cup, I'll tell you, it doesn't taste like blood. And when I take the bread, it's not the body of Christ. I know what flesh, meat tastes like.

And when I eat this bread, it does not taste like meat. It's a fellowship in the body of Christ. I don't want to fool myself.

Oh, this is meat. Oh, this is blood. It's not.

And the blood of Christ tasted exactly like human blood. This was no different. But this is a fellowship in the blood of Christ.

It's wine. It doesn't change. It's grape juice.

This is bread from wheat. It doesn't change its taste. But it's symbolism of my fellowship with the body, with the body of Christ and the blood of Christ, as it says in verse 16.

Isn't it a fellowship of sharing? And verse 17, here it says, since there is one bread, we are testifying, Debbie, that we who are many are one body, because we all partake of that one bread. That's the significance of one bread. And that's why we don't break it up into little pieces and pass it around for you to take.

That's why we make you break it and take it. Because I can't take the responsibility for you saying that you will deny yourself and take up the cross every day. No, you better testify to that yourself.

When you break that, you're saying, Lord, I want to be broken like you were broken. Lord, I'm testifying that I'm part of this body. Your testimony, your responsibility.

If I break it up and give it to you in little pieces, then you can say, I didn't break it, I just ate what was given to me. No, you can't escape. You are breaking it.

You're testifying before God. I want to walk the same broken way you walked, Lord. And breaking bread, one bread with these people, I'm saying I'm committed to this body.

Because we who are many are one body in Christ. If you're not committed, don't tell a lie. So it's a very serious thing.

It also speaks of the centrality of the cross in the church, the message of the cross. Baptism speaks of the cross, death, burial, resurrection. Breaking a bread speaks of the cross, the death of Christ and our fellowship together, which comes through our being broken.

When we are broken, so think of how this one bread was made. Many grains of wheat were stuck together. No, you can't make bread like that.

The grains of wheat have to be ground and powdered, crushed and mixed up with water and then made into bread. That's how God makes us today too. Crushes, breaks, those are willing to be crushed and broken.

The Holy Spirit comes and unites like the water uniting that crushed wheat. Made into one bread. Now, if in the process, one little grain of wheat somehow escaped being crushed, supposing you're eating a chapati and one grain of wheat, it didn't get crushed, gets into your mouth, what do you do with it? Spit it out.

Exactly. And that's what Jesus does with someone who's not crushed. In the final analysis, you'll be spat out.

Says in Revelation 3, I'll vomit you out of my mouth. He says to the church in Laodicea. So in all these things, we deal with him.

We don't deal with man. We don't deal with this church. We deal with Jesus Christ, who's in our midst, who can break the bread.

Again, we seek to follow Jesus' example. He was like the father figure there. And so we ask the elders of a church to break bread.

We try to follow the scriptures exactly as much as possible down to the last little jot and tittle, because we know that then we can have the glory of God in our midst. And the two disciples walked to Emmaus. They couldn't recognize Jesus, but it says they went home and they broke bread.

And as he broke the bread, suddenly their eyes were opened, it says, and they recognized him. They saw the nail prints in his hands. And I pray that as we break bread today, we will recognize him.

He who is in our midst, our crucified Savior, but risen and with power. Let's give thanks for the bread.

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