

Discussion on communion

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[0:00] Well, this evening I'd like us to try and get our communion heads back on again. And we did quite a few studies on this back in December, and December.

And I did listen to the talks again, and I thought two things. I thought, oh, they're quite long. I thought, actually, they're quite good. I was learning something, listening to myself talk. I'd never thought of that before. So they are up on the web, and although I say it myself, there are some things they're worth listening to.

So I listened to them again in preparation for this. So the subject, the aim is to enable us rightly to understand communion, to appreciate communion, to respond to the Lord's Supper, and in order to order our church life to please the Lord as much as possible.

And I think we'd add to that for the edification of the church as much as possible. And the way we're going to do this, having thought about it at some length, is to bring this to a members' meeting.

[1:25] And let me just explain what a members' meeting is. This is not the normal meeting for edification and praise, but the meeting in which decisions are made.

And you will know from the book of Acts that sometimes the Lord blesses through prayer, sometimes the Lord blesses through his word, and sometimes the Lord blesses through the business of decision-making within the church.

So when there was a dispute between the Hebraic widows and the Greek-speaking widows, they didn't just pray about it. They thought, what can we do?

What can we decide? Whom can we appoint? What arrangements can we make? And that was the way that the kingdom went forward. And at a members' meeting, decisions are made, and we operate a system of having members.

And these are people who have said, I am part of this church. I am willing to bear the burden of this church in prayer and giving and supporting.

[2:34] And therefore I have a say in the decisions of this church. And of course, every Christian ought to be in that position with one church or another.

But this is the way we work it in our church. And the assembly for doing business has authority, because in my reading of Matthew 18, it is the final court.

If somebody is in sin and they come to the assembly, and the assembly decides they should be treated as not a Christian, then they are treated as not a Christian.

And the decision that's made on earth is ratified in heaven. That's a huge amount of power in that assembly. And there's freedom in the assembly too. There is freedom to decide things that may be worked in the 15th century and change them in the 16th century and change them in the 21st century.

There's a degree of freedom in that meeting. And the thing that we're looking at on the arrangements for communion, as I understand it, are not by fixed command of the Lord.

[3:46] The Lord does not say, you will celebrate communion on the first Sunday of the month at such and such a time, and on the third Sunday of the month at such and such a time.

That's a human arrangement. We've arranged that at some point in the past. The Lord does say, remember me. He does say that. But how often, how we do it, he says, well, you sort that out.

As long as you're remembering me, that's the thing that I want you to do. In my view, this is not by command of the elders. The elders are told to command the assembly things.

But the things they're told to command the assembly are the things of Scripture. So believe the gospel. Repent of sin. Repent of specific sins.

Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. These are the things of Scripture which the elders command. But it's not, in my understanding of it, the thing that the elders decide independently when and where we'll meet, and everybody else's job is just to go along with that.

[4:57] But I think that that choice, and that is something for the assembly, and the assembly needs a wise, spiritual pragmatism.

So we have a certain arrangement for communion. First Sunday, 10 o'clock. Third Sunday, end of evening service. And that was decided by our church in the dim and distant past.

It's not so dim and distant that the 10 o'clock one was decided. Because I can remember that. You can remember that, can't you? And the church decided that for certain good reasons. It hasn't always done that.

But in that situation, we thought about it quite carefully, and we asked what will work best for us as a church at that moment, which I would imagine would be early 80s or something, do you think?

And it's not a wrong thing for us to say, well, now it's different. The demographics of the church is different. Life is different. The pressures of life, I mean, they've always been there, but they're not quite the same as they were in those days.

[6:12] And we asked the question, what will work best for us as a church at the moment? A wise, spiritual pragmatism.

Wise means you think about it and pray about it. Spiritual means you have a scale of values according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And pragmatism says, what will actually work?

You might say, well, why don't we have our prayer meeting at 5.30 in the morning? Because we really start the day well. And that would be great. And Corinne and I would be saying, oh, please don't have a prayer meeting at 5.30.

That won't work for us, because we're not morning people, are we? So there is this, what works for us? Okay, enough of that. So I'm going to simply recap what we looked at before and come to one slide at the end, which I'd like you to think about as part of the decision making.

Here's where communion originates. Here's the Matthew version. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, take and eat, this is my body.

[7:32] Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. And I don't think anybody has ever exhausted the thought of and the description of what it must have been like on that first occasion.

We read it through in Mark with a little bit of the context on either side, that Jesus is headed for his death. And they don't quite compute that.

But that woman who poured the perfume on him had some sort of insight into that. And Jesus said, that's the significance of what she's doing. She's anointing me for my burial.

And then they come together for this supper. And in many ways, I guess the disciples, I think, this is a Passover supper. This is what we Jews do. It celebrates our Jewishness.

[8:53] And in the middle of it, sort of out of the blue, Jesus does this thing with the bread and the wine and hands around the bread and tells them that they must eat it and says, this is my body.

And they're thinking. And then he hands around the cup. There would have been a cup in the Jewish Passover. And he says, you all drink this.

This is my blood of the covenant or of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. And they're thinking.

And then he says to them, there's something coming because I won't drink this again until I drink it with newness in my Father's kingdom.

And they're probably thinking, wow. This is a stunning thing to happen. As if they didn't have enough to think about. They have this to think about now.

[10:06] And then we, as you know, Peter is saying, well, I'm not going to betray you. I certainly wouldn't do anything like that. I wouldn't, sorry, I wouldn't deny you. Of course, he hasn't got that right, has he?

And Jesus keeps saying, now this is it. This is the night. I'm betrayed by one of you. And he goes and prays.

And I think they still don't get it because they're tired. And Jesus is praying this agonized prayer. Let this cup pass from me.

And of course, the Father says, that's not my will. And then the tension suddenly sort of snaps. Here they are. Knocking on, well, not knocking on the door, but the crowd with the clubs and spears.

What does it say? Clubs and, swords and clubs. And Jesus is arrested and taken away. And then that's the context for this stunning meal that Jesus institutes.

[11:14] So, there's the things that Jesus said. And there are the people reclining at the table as Jesus gives them bread and wine.

And you may remember, perhaps we'll just remind ourselves, of all the connections that are coming in to this singular event. So, we have the connection of Passover.

So, what happened in Passover where the lamb was slain? And, do you remember, it was the first day for Israel.

Reset your clocks. Change your calendars. This is day one. This is where it all begins. And Jesus takes this and says, well, here is like a new Passover.

We bring into it the thought of a covenant sealing meal. Do you remember the thing in Exodus where in the first covenant, well, that's the first covenant, the covenant with Moses, there was the blood of that covenant.

[12:22] And it was sprinkled and shed. And in celebration of that, 70 elders went up the mountains. Do you remember? It was 70 and another four, I think.

And they went up. And God was there. And the description of God is simply that you could see the pavement under his feet. And the pavement was something like sapphire.

And they ate and drank with God. And I've forgotten the exact wording, but they were unharmed. That's not the exact wording, but it was something like that. So, that meal, this is the blood of the covenant.

That's the first time those words were spoken. And then Jesus speaks those words. This is the blood of the new covenant. And that meal, the covenant sealing meal.

Right. If you would like to go to sleep, let me give you one thing before you go to sleep to think about. Does anybody follow Aaron's mum on Facebook?

[13:24] And she's going to a particular event, is she not? Which is, correct me if I'm wrong, is it Woman of the Year?

She's going to Woman of the Year. Now, whether she's going with 364 other, or 11 others, or just her, I don't know.

But she's going to Woman of the Year. She's been invited in the presence of the Countess, something or other. She couldn't, she didn't know which Countess it was.

And what are they going to do at this celebration? They're going to eat a meal together. And she's honoured by being invited to the Woman of the Year for Sussex.

Not the whole world. But the, and in the presence of the Countess of so-and-so, she will eat a meal. What an honour. Now, communion is Christians being invited in the presence of the King of Kings to eat a meal.

[14:46] What an honour. How wonderful. people. And if Angie puts on Facebook, in a very modest way, but she's just saying, invited to Woman of the Year, shouldn't we put on Facebook every month invited to dine with the King of Kings?

What an honour. Have that thought. You can go to sleep for the rest of it. That was the good bit. Let's carry on with the thoughts here.

A covenant sealing meal. The hospitality of God. Let's sit down and eat a meal together. That's what it's basically saying.

The host is not visible. He is nevertheless real and present. And he says, it's called the Lord's Supper.

He is the host. God's hospitality. What does it say at the end of Psalm 23?

[15:55] He spreads a table in the presence of my enemies. And here we are to enjoy the hospitality of God.

Let's bring in that thought of a single act of history with life-changing power. Because there's that dimension of it too.

We could think of single acts of history that have changed everything. I mean, Brexit will go down as that. And whether in future we will have a Brexit day and have parties on that day or what, I don't know.

But if you think of 1066, which was when the Normans invaded Hastings, Battle of Hastings, that's changed everything.

It's changed everything. If we were from Northern Ireland, we would remember the Battle of the Boyne and we would have marches every year because that changed everything. And this, what this remembers changed everything.

[17:06] And Jesus says, remember it. Don't forget it. Make sure that in your present, you remember that powerful act in the past.

That changed everything. Don't forget it. a single act in history with life-changing power forever remembered.

And let's also bring in this other ingredient of meaning. It's a covenant meal. And covenant in the Bible is at least this.

It's a relationship of powerful commitment. covenant. That when God made the covenant with Israel, he said, I'm bonded to you.

You are bonded to me. And let no, what does it say at the end of the wedding? What God has joined, let no one put asunder. And that covenant had power and strength.

[18:15] It wasn't actually good enough to overcome the drag of sin and the effects of sin. But that covenant with Moses was a powerful one and Jesus says, I've got a better covenant.

Isn't that the word that rolls on through Hebrews? What we have is better. Better promises, better provision, better blood.

And this is a powerful commitment, a covenant commitment full of promises and strength and faithfulness and God's, what shall I say, his stubbornness in refusing to allow that covenant to be broken.

I will not let you go is what the covenant says. And he seals this in blood and we come to a covenant meal. And we also think of what this says about who we are and who we're joined to. So, the idea that something doesn't just affect me, although it does affect me, but it affects us and it makes us us, us, if you see what I mean.

[19:45] So, you could think of various groups, you know, the us of the people who enjoy working with steam railways and you could say, yeah, that's us, the t-shirt, we do steam railways, that's us.

Or you could have the us of people who support Chelsea, yeah, that's us. But the us of communion is us, the people bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

That's us together. And of course, it's not just us in this room or any other similar room, but across the world. It's what Christians do. It's what Christians do distinctively, marking them out as different from any other us.

and the act of eating and drinking is also a powerful thing. You remember when we were looking in Genesis, it was actually eating that brought the whole problem, wasn't it?

Taking something into ourselves willingly, it's not like an injection where you have to look, well I do, you look away because you don't want it to happen to you really, but this is a willing thing, isn't it?

[21:02] And you think of eating together, that's a social thing, but the act of eating, you're taking into yourself, approving of, benefiting from, receiving the benefits of what the meal is.

My wife is a wonderful cook, make sure that's on the recording, she's a brilliant cook, and I am so blessed by eating the food she provides day by day, and that is now part of me.

And as we come to the Lord's table, we are blessed, not simply by the whatever juice it is, or the lovely looking bread, but what it signifies.

It's what it signifies. Jesus said it signifies something. When you think of the bread, it's actually signifying my body.

When you think of the wine, it signifies my blood. That's what you're eating and drinking. That's what the benefits that you are signifying, signifying your approval and reception of.

[22:22] love. And it's new, as I've already said, what Christ brings is better, a better lamb, better blood, better covenant, better sacrifices, better promises.

and add to that the fact that it looks forward. Until he comes is said more or less every time we take communion.

Jesus said, I'm going to drink new in my father's kingdom. He was looking forward. And when we come together, we don't just look to the past.

on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread. We don't just look to the past. We look forward to the future. What he achieved will have its fruition in the future, definitely, and each time we take communion, we are one step closer to the final fruition.

A future feast. feast. We will sit at table one day, not just with one another, but with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and we will sit in the feast with all of those people.

[23:56] And you remember that Jesus refers to himself as the bread, bread. And then he says, well, actually, you have to think of my flesh as what you eat, because just bread doesn't cover the fact that flesh means blood, and like raw meat, and all that sort of thing, and that's what it is.

It's a body broken. Think of flesh and blood. And even that is not the center of it, because the central thing is actually the cross.

And when we take of the bread and the wine, we're meant to see beyond that. That's not the central thing. The central thing is what it points to.

It points to Jesus. It points to Jesus' death. So those were the roots of it.

And we looked at Paul's tradition, and I'll just do this very quickly because I think we've got the main point of those things. Do you remember Paul's tradition in the 1 Corinthians 11 where he says, let's read it together, 1 Corinthians 11.

[25:15] 11. 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Corinthians 11 verse 2, he says, I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings just as I pass them on to you.

And then in verse 17 he says in the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good, it's a terrible thing to say. And he describes the way they've managed to get the Lord's Supper wrong, and in order to get them right, he boils it down to the absolute essentials, which he describes in verse 23.

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way after supper he took the cup saying, 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.

[27:10] And there it is boiled down to its basic essentials. And you remember the comments that we made on this, that it is referencing history past.

On the night he was betrayed, it is remembering in the present. Do this in remembrance of me. Keep on doing it. If you have forgotten the last time you had communion you are not doing it often enough because you need to keep on remembering.

And looking forward to the future because the best, the fulfillment is yet to come. We talked about the people partaking that it is assumed that they did it.

they just do it. That is what Christians do. And it is accountable. He says that there is judgment, goes on to say, for example, in verse 28, a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

And he talks about God's judgment. Verse 22, we're judged by the Lord being disciplined. So there's an accountability in doing it, a seriousness about it.

[28:27] It means something. It's not just a free-for-all. It's something we do together. When you come together, you eat the Lord's supper.

It's a communal thing. And it's something which ought to do us good. Something in which he ought to be able to praise and say, good is being done.

Not that more harm than good is being done, but a lot of good is being done. That Christ should bless and feed us around his table. Now I think I'm going to stop there.

It was built as a discussion, but I think because we're going to take communion, we'll just keep the main thing, the main thing this evening. And we'll come around the Lord's table, and that will be what we do for this evening.

We're going to carry on next Sunday evening, God helping us, but rather than bring in anything else, let's just focus on what Christ has done for us.

[29:30] And can we sing our song, please, which was, Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us, and we remember.

So the moment between me stopping talking and to be starting the music is the gap between what we've just been doing and the communion, so we more or less go straight into it.

So I'll just remind people again, you're very welcome to come to the table, it's for believers. Let's sing our song. Let's sing Let's together.

Let's together. Let's Let's Let's Thank you.