

# The Ultimate Sacrifice

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[ 0 : 00 ] Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us as a church, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

Today, we are excited to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let that Word get into us and transform these hearts. Now, before we get started here, I just want to give you a little heads up that this message is going to be a touch different than a normal message that we do.

We're actually going to take communion, the bread that represents Jesus' body, the juice that represents His blood spilt for us. We're actually going to take that later on in the message.

So if you want to pause at any point this video and you want to go grab a cracker or bread and some juice, something close to juice, and you want to participate together, we would absolutely love if you'd like to do that.

So feel free to pause at any point and you can go do that. But hey, I have been on sabbatical the whole month of May. I have been gone away from the church for the purpose of recharging, refueling, relaxing, all kinds of things, just to get recharged to come back to the church and truly serve with all my heart.

[ 1 : 24 ] It's been a great month. I am so thankful to our elders, to our church family. So thank you. I truly appreciate this time away. And I'm excited to be back today preaching God's word with you.

Now, I have a confession that I have to make. Sometimes I'm guilty of taking the sacrifices of our soldiers for granted. Sometimes I demand freedom without giving a second thought to why I have it in the first place.

Sometimes I whine about the sacrifices of ministry when it doesn't begin to compare that the sacrifices our soldiers and their loved ones have made.

They've left everything behind to ensure that we get to enjoy our families, our homes, our dreams.

We kind of honored them last weekend on Memorial Day. You know, sometimes I even complain about a lack of sleep when our soldiers push their bodies to the very edge in order that I can lay my head down at night in peace.

If you have served our country in any branch of the military, maybe even lost a loved one as they served, please know that we are forever grateful here at FCC for your service and for the sacrifice.

[ 2 : 39 ] Now, on Memorial Day in 1983, Ronald Reagan said these famous words. He said, I don't have to tell you how fragile this precious gift of freedom is.

Every time we hear, watch, or read the news, we are reminded that liberty is a rare commodity in this world. And church, we are truly blessed to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave, the United States of America.

And I want to be very careful here how my words are going to come across in just a second,

because I am so very grateful for the sacrifices that have been made to safeguard our freedoms.

Even my nephew, he has served in the United States Army for the last five years. We're so excited because he's going to get out probably sometime this month after completing his active duty.

But today we come to acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice that was made by Jesus so that you and I wouldn't have to face the punishment that we deserve.

[ 3 : 43 ] The ultimate sacrifice that he made on the cross to pay the debt that I owe, that you owe, to set our hearts free right now on this earth and for all eternity in heaven.

Now, I'm sure you'll notice as we keep going in this service today, a few things that are going to be arranged a little differently from usual. Like I mentioned earlier, this message is going to look just a little different.

But I want you to know the reason why we're doing this is because I really want to just focus this whole sermon around the sacrifice Jesus made when he willingly went to that cross, gave up his body, gave up his blood so that we could be cleansed.

Now, if you have your Bibles, go ahead and go to Luke chapter 22. I'll give you just a couple moments here to get there. It's more than three quarters of the way through your Bible.

Luke 22, we'll start here in verse 14 and we will go through verse 20. Starting here in Luke 22, verse 14.

[ 4 : 51 ] When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

For I tell you, I will not eat again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them saying, This is my body given 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, which is poured out for you.

What a popular passage anytime that we get up and we serve communion. And I know there are a lot of people that ask why we in the independent Christian church make such a big deal about communion.

Why is it such a special time in your service each week? Even why do we partake of it every single week? And the answer to these questions is that it all comes down to what that bread and what that juice represents.

[ 6 : 08 ] See, there's a big difference between a sign and a symbol. As Rubel Shelley has noted, a sign is a pointer to some reality beyond itself. But a symbol actually participates in that reality.

In other words, if you were to drive up on a stop sign that, let's say it's been run over, mangled by a car, I seriously doubt, unless you just got real emotional problems, that you're going to get out and you're going to start crying over that sign.

Just a sign, right? That would be weird. Granted, it is still important. It keeps people safe. You want to call and you want to get that taken care of right away, but it's still just a sign.

However, if you and I were to drive up on a house where there are grown men and women outside and they are burning an American flag in the open, if you're like me, that would make your blood boil because it's more than a sign.

That flag is a symbol that stands for what our country was founded upon, where we've been as a nation, and even where we're going. Now, do you see why taking the bread and the juice is so important?

[ 7 : 16 ] Because it represents something, and this is hard to say, but it's absolutely true as our faith has to be number one in our lives, but it represents something even more powerful than the American flag.

It represents our Savior who went to the cross giving up his life so that we don't have to pay for our own sins. It is participation in the amazing grace of our God.

And so I just want to look today at four different aspects of communion that are so important for us to understand each week as we partake of the Lord's Supper.

So if you are a note taker, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app. If you go under events under First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, you can see our outline, even take notes off to the side.

But go ahead and look at this first point here. The first aspect of communion is what we're calling coming alive. And you can write out to the side there, in my mind, in my heart.

[ 8 : 20 ] Now, before you get all worked up with what I just said, thinking you know what I'm talking about here, let me first say that we don't believe, we absolutely don't believe that Scripture teaches that the bread and the juice are somehow literally transformed into the body and the blood, the literal body and blood of Christ.

When Jesus first initiated the Lord's Supper, what was it? It was bread. It was the fruit of the vine. And in the passages that talk about the Lord's Supper, you see a really important word, the word remembrance.

See, in 1 Corinthians 11, if we look here in verses 24 through 26, actually puts it like this.

It says, So, like the American flag, but even more powerful, the bread and the juice are a symbol of this ultimate sacrifice that Christ made for us.

So, what I mean by coming alive is something that the Hebrew culture would have understood immediately whenever they heard that word remembrance, whenever it came out of Jesus' or even the Apostle Paul's mouth.

[ 9 : 47 ] See, Byron Lambert tells us that the word remembrance means to bring to life that moment, to bring that moment back to life in your mind and in your heart, to make it come alive.

So, one thing I often do, a lot of people do when they take communion, is remember back to when I first gave my heart to Jesus, how His Spirit flooded my life with peace and joy, how He set me free from those awful sins I had committed.

And as the old hymn says, there truly is power in the blood. And guys, I remember when Bethany and I, when we first started dating, and that first month was so amazing because we could just see God drawing our hearts closer and closer to one another.

He was in the middle of it all. He could, we could see Him just developing our relationship. I just knew, we kind of knew that this is probably the one.

But then February, the next month of 2007 came, and Bethany started to have some health problems. I mean, really quickly in our relationship. And that's when she informed me that she was anemic.

[ 10 : 59 ] Her body would lose blood. And actually a few years before we met, she had to get a really serious blood transfusion, way too much blood at once. And this time, one month into our relationship, she started going down the same road and being kind of stubborn, she would admit it, she didn't go to the doctor right away until one morning she blacked out.

So Bethany and her mom went to the hospital. They got it all figured out. They scheduled a time for her to get blood. And then that day they went to get blood. And I was going to ride up with her dad a little bit later to see her.

Now, I have to tell you, I was kind of nervous because I didn't really know her dad at all. I just knew she was a daddy's girl. And I was just hoping that he wouldn't like get going 55 and kind of kick me out the door.

But the trip went well. We had a great talk about Jesus. And then when we got to Schneck Medical Center, I was amazed. See, when she was low on blood, she was pale.

She had no color in her lips. Her heart was beaten out of her chest. It just seemed like life had just been sucked out of her. But when we got there, she was almost done getting the blood.

[ 12 : 08 ] It was like someone had just taken a pump and pumped the life right back into her. She was more energetic. Her color was back. And she wanted to go to Steak and Shake. And like the Bible says, life truly is in the blood.

And then as we look at a passage like Colossians 2, 13 and 14, Paul actually puts it like this. He says, you were dead because of your sins and because of your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

So when we take those symbols, that bread and that juice that represents his body, his blood, it brings to life that sacrifice that he made for us on the cross.

The awful suffering that we can't even understand. So the first aspect we're talking about today of communion is Jesus' sacrifice coming alive in my mind and in my heart.

[ 13 : 13 ] Whether I've been a Christian for a week or whether I've been a Christian for 90 years. And I picture as best as I can all that he went through to say to you and I, I love you this much.

And then the second aspect of communion that I want you to see is conviction. So coming alive, just that powerful moment coming alive in our minds once again, and then conviction.

See in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 27 and 28, it says this, Now, I have to admit, anytime I hear this passage read and not explained in context, I get kind of worried because I've seen people use this in a very judgmental way.

I've seen this quoted with an attitude of self-righteousness. And because of that, I've met people who will often just not take communion at all because they've had a bad week or maybe felt like they drifted away from God.

And their reason for not doing it is they don't want to take it in an unworthy manner. And while I appreciate their heart, if you investigate this passage more, if you read the whole chapter, you start

to realize that that way of thinking isn't necessarily what Paul is saying.

[14:46] He's not trying to scare Christians away from taking the Lord's Supper. The truth is none of us are worthy. On your best week, you and I are not worthy.

You must be, you know, if you think you must be sinless and perfect to take communion, if you have to be some superhero of the faith to take the Lord's Supper, then listen, we're going to save a lot of money on bread and juice because nobody at FCC or any other church for that matter is going to be taking it.

Paul's point here, if you read verses 17 to the end of the chapter, his point is that we shouldn't take communion with divisive or selfish or lackadaisical or even hard hearts.

We can't come to the table with a flippancy, with a heart of entitlement, with a heart of pride. We shouldn't think for some reason that we got it all figured out, that we have all the answers for everyone else.

Instead, we come with a heart of sincerity and even humility, realizing that we were lost and only because of Jesus and his grace are we now found.

[15:55] That we were blind and now we see. Understanding that there are still going to be things in our life that do not glorify Jesus. We are a work in progress and we have to lay those things down at the foot of the cross every single week.

Now back during the Vietnam War, there was a young man named Tony and four of his buddies that were in the middle of enemy fire. They were hiding behind a building.

They were outnumbered. They were trying to fire back and fight against the enemy when suddenly an explosive device was thrown right next to them. Now normally this would probably wipe out or really, really injure all the guys.

But immediately, without hesitation, as soon as it got thrown, Tony jumped on top of it. And as you can imagine, he took the brunt of the explosion. Sadly, it did take his life.

However, all his buddies survived. They were okay because of his incredible sacrifice. Well, about a year later, after all the soldiers came home, that's when Tony's mom and dad decided to have them over to their house to get some closure.

[17:01] They simply wanted to meet the four young men that their son had died for. They sent out letters. So we're talking years ago. We didn't have all the technology we have today. They sent out letters asking that they, please, please, it was a date far in advance.

Please let us know if you cannot make it. Well, they didn't hear anything from the guys for months.

About a week before that they would have them over, one of the young men called and left a message on the machine saying, hey, I'm sorry, but I just have too much going on in my life.

I'm not going to be able to come. Then about three days before the event, they got a letter in the mail from another one of the young men saying he was sorry he couldn't make it. He had the weekend off and he just wanted to go camping with some friends of his.

Well, frustrated by this, Tony's mom and dad thought, well, it doesn't do any good to get upset about this. At least we get to meet two of his closest friends. The day arrived.

They were supposed to be there at two o'clock in the afternoon. Two o'clock came, two o'clock went. It wasn't until three that one of the guys shows up in a taxi and he gets out and he just starts staggering and they're like, oh, wow.

[18:12] They realize this guy's drunk and he's just like slurring words. He's just an absolute mess, not even able to have a talk with him at all. And then the other guy never did show up.

And that's when Tony's mom, she just lost it. She was so furious, so hurt. She cried out and said, I can't believe this, that my son who had this incredibly bright future ahead of him, that he would die for these men who act like they don't even care what he did.

They are making a mockery of his death. And you know what? I think that's a pretty good example of what the passage we just read is talking about. We should come into our time of communion not at all taking it flippantly, making a mockery of Jesus.

We should come with a heart of repentance toward our sin, a heart of sorrow because of our sin, while also having an attitude of thankfulness toward Christ's sacrifice.

More than anything, we examine ourselves. We look inward and we ask the Lord, just like David did, to create in us a pure heart that honors him, a heart that is seeking to grow closer to him every day.

[ 19 : 22 ] So let communion not only be a time to let Christ's sacrifice come alive in your heart again, also allow God to begin to reveal those things in our lives that don't honor him.

Lay them down at the cross, striving to be more like Jesus every day. See, conviction is an important aspect of communion. And then third, something we don't talk about near enough, the third aspect is community.

Community. Now, in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 17, the Apostle Paul puts it like this. He says, See, not only is the Lord's Supper a time where Christ's sacrifice comes alive in our hearts, not only is this a time where we are convicted asking God to purge our hearts, but it's also a time where our petty differences, our opinions, our preferences, they start to fade as we draw close to one another as the true body of Christ.

You know, probably 15 years ago, I went to a one-day conference in Converse, Indiana called Breathe. Its purpose, a lot like my sabbatical, was to encourage those in ministry, give us a chance to breathe, refueling us so that we could come back to our churches and hopefully just stay faithful, serving God with all our hearts.

I also went because I knew that the well-known minister, Bob Russell, was going to be the speaker, just an amazing man of God. I was there with my mentor, Steve Abernathy, and when it was time for lunch, Steve, who was quite the social butterfly, he got to talking with another preacher.

[ 21 : 15 ] So that's fine, but we were the last ones to get in line to eat. We were having trouble finding a table, and finally we spotted a table with two seats. And we noticed right away that, wow, these guys are a lot different from us in several different ways.

So here are some of the differences between Steve and I and the other four guys at the table. First was our skin color. See, I'm so white, I glow in the dark, okay? These guys were black.

Some had dreadlocks. I got my nice little Opie Taylor going on here. I'm from the middle of a cornfield. They lived in the inner city. Another thing was we talked a little differently than one another.

There was no doubt that we were opposite in many ways, but it didn't matter at all because we sat there for probably 30, 40 minutes, had a great conversation about Jesus, how he was moving at their church in the inner city, just like he was moving at our church in the country.

And when the day was over, we hugged and we said our goodbyes, and it was so cool how the world will try to tell us just the reasons why we shouldn't like each other, we're this different, we're that different, whatever.

[ 22 : 25 ] But you know what? We really got along great, and we were unified, and we were united by one most powerful thing, and that's Jesus Christ. And you know what?

The same thing's true for us today. There are a lot of different opinions of people watching this video right now on politics, on parenting, even church and how we do that, maybe on some finer points of theology.

But all those things we set aside through these symbols that represent the body and the blood of Jesus. See, it's through Jesus that we're united as one army for God.

I want you to listen one more time to how Rubel Shelley puts this. He says, the Lord's Supper is not a private act of piety, but it's a right that has its proper place in community.

Its simple but profound symbolism establishes a focus and rallying point for the church. In partaking of the body, the church becomes one body. If the church ever comes to understand fully the depth of this mystery, then many of the petty divisions which plague it will cease.

[ 23 : 33 ] Power will replace routine, and the Lordship of Christ will truly be proclaimed by the church. So, as we go into a special time here, if you remember earlier in the video, I encouraged you, and you can still do this, pause the video, go get a cracker or bread, and maybe some grape juice or something close.

But we're going to go into a time of communion here today. And we're going to hold on to both the bread and the juice.

We're going to give you just about a minute. I know this is a little different than normal. We're going to give you about a minute with some music behind the screen, and we're just going to let you reflect. Okay? And then after about a minute of just reflecting on everything we've talked about today, focusing on the cross of Jesus Christ, examining these hearts, worshiping Him in that time as well, I'm going to come back up, and I'm going to lead us in taking both the bread and the juice.

But I want to encourage you to take this time. Let His sacrifice come alive in your heart as you remember what He did on the cross and by the empty tomb, as we remember how good He's been to us.

Let's examine our lives, surrendering all completely to God, and realize that the Lord's Supper draws us closer to the Lord, and it draws us closer to one another.

[ 24 : 56 ] Let's pray before we examine our hearts. Father, I just thank You so much for just how good You are, for what You did on the cross, the most amazing act of sacrificial love the world has ever known, and we just pray that as we reflect on the cross in our own lives, that You will just do an incredible work in us, and that we can truly, truly strive to love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We pray this in Jesus' precious and holy name. Amen. Now go ahead and just take a minute and reflect. All right, I hope you had just a powerful time of prayer with Christ, and so if you do have bread or a cracker or something, we're gonna go ahead and hold that up, and in remembrance of Jesus' broken body for us, let's partake as the body of Christ.

And then we take the juice that represents His blood spilt for us, for our sins that has become our lifeblood.

Let's go ahead and partake. Thank you for just participating with us in that.

We truly appreciate that, and I just wanna share one last thing with you. Here in 1 Chronicles 16, 23 through 25, it actually puts it like this.

[ 26 : 57 ] Sing to the Lord all the earth. Proclaim His salvation day after day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all the peoples, for great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.

Now one last aspect of the Lord's Supper that we often overlook, and that is the celebration part. It's often a very quiet, somber part of the service, and that's okay during reflection, but we have to realize it must end with celebration.

See, too often we Christians are guilty of leaving Jesus on the cross as we find ourselves not experiencing His joy and His peace that His death and resurrection brings.

We are called to walk in the fruits of the Spirit, and I hope as you went through this time of communion, no matter how you walked into your room or your kitchen or wherever you're at right now, no matter what junk is going on in your life, I hope that you drew closer to your Savior.

I hope that you can walk away from this message with a heart of celebration because you have a God who loved you enough to send Jesus to the cross to suffer and die a criminal's death to take away your sins.

[ 28 : 13 ] But listen, He didn't stop there. He rose again three days later to offer us life abundant on this earth and life everlasting in paradise someday, and that is a great reason to celebrate.

And listen, if you have never accepted God's grace and you're ready to truly give your whole heart to Him, I want you to know He's ready to take it and He's ready to transform you.

So I just want to share just a simple invitation with you. Because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, because He came to this earth and died for your sins and for mine, because He rose again to conquer death, He is the only way to salvation.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, John 14, 6 says, except through Him. And He wants to come into your life. It doesn't matter where you've been, what you've done, His grace can forgive every sin, even the one that you might be thinking about right now that you just have a hard time believing anyone can forgive.

God can forgive that too. So if you are ready to say, Jesus, I give my life to you, I surrender to you, we at First Christian Church, we'd love to come alongside you and just help you on this journey, walk through the Word of God, get you baptized, just like the scriptures teach that you should do as you give your life to Christ.

[ 29 : 44 ] So, just want to tell you a couple ways that you can reach out before we close in prayer. So we are once again First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray. You can reach out by calling 812-663-8488.

That's 812-663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Hey, let's go ahead and pray together as we close. Heavenly Father, I just thank you for this kind of unique message that just shows us what a time of taking the Lord's Supper is truly all about.

And Jesus, we thank you that you went to the cross and you died for us. You died for us to set us free. And as we come to this moment of staring at the cross once again, we are letting that sacrifice come alive in our hearts once again.

So, Father, thank you for just showing us your word today. And we pray you will stir it in our hearts and that we can walk away from this message loving you and following you even more.

We pray all of this in Jesus' precious and holy name. And God's people said, Amen and Amen. Hey, you go and you have a fantastic week. God bless you.