

The Lord's Table and a Love Feast

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn your Bible first of all to Jude verse 12 and we will begin our communion!

study by taking just a moment to look at a text that really in some senses is an introduction! Lord, to where we will spend the majority of our time.

But before we read the passage and then think about it together, I want you to join me in prayer.

Our Father God, this morning as we come to you, we're reminded yet again of what the scriptures tell us that not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.

And we who are your children are so incredibly, so richly blessed that we who enjoy salvation also enjoy the ministry of the Spirit of God that indwells every believer.

And we ask that your Spirit who you have given to us would quicken our heart this morning to grow in our affection for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 27] I pray, Lord, for the declaration of your word that it might be marked this morning by scriptural clarity and spiritual power.

Lord, that Christ, who receives the adoration and praise in heaven, would receive that which is his due here among your people as well.

Lord, help us, Lord, to be yielded to your Spirit and to your scripture and to be thankful for the work that you do among us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name for his glory. Amen. I want you to look with me just there for a minute at verse 12.

It says, These are hidden reefs at your love feasts. Really only want to think about two words there, and that is the word love feast.

[2 : 26] And as I was meditating and praying about this day and when we come to this table, I am mindful of the fact that here is Jude writing to address a problem that was taking place in the church.

And what was going on was something that was offensive to what God's people were actually gathering to do when they gathered around the Lord's table. And we have that little description that is given of what the Lord's table actually was and is.

It says, It's a love feast. We have similar vocabulary in our own culture. When we think of Thanksgiving and we have Thanksgiving dinner, why are we having dinner?

I mean, every one of us have dinner on a fairly regular basis. In fact, if we don't have dinner on a fairly regular basis, our body begins telling us that it's din-din time. Am I right?

We're connected. But when we have Thanksgiving dinner, what is the significance of Thanksgiving dinner? There's something that happens along with that, right?

[3 : 28] Most of us, we have a day that's set aside somewhere in November. Am I right? I think I am. And we do family things. We enjoy. How many of you have a fairly routine Thanksgiving dinner?

I mean, can you have Thanksgiving in America without having turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy and, I don't know, here we go. We get oyster dressing for those who are really religious. You know, there are certain things that go with Thanksgiving. How about cranberries? Anybody here a cranberry person? Or how many of you just kind of let it pass? I mean, it's a good thing that the Indians enjoyed it years ago, but not you, right?

A little tart and all that. What am I doing this for? But Thanksgiving dinner, it goes with Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. And here is this little statement that when the church gathered and partook of the Lord's table, they thought about it as a love feast.

It was a time where in their celebration, the central focus was on the matter of the love of Christ. Let me ask you a question here, and I want you to think practically with me.

[4 : 36] And I do want you to think carefully. How many of you, as you think this morning, recognize that there are times in your life where your love for the Lord Jesus Christ is not as fervent as it should be?

It's not as white hot as it should be. I was thinking earlier this morning of the passage in Revelation chapter 2, verse 4, where Jesus, as He is writing to the church, He says, Listen, your love has grown cold.

Your love is not what it used to be. And return to that first love. And I recognize in Tim Knoyer's life, and I would think that probably I'm not entirely atypical, there are times that my life would match yours.

And that my love for the Lord Jesus Christ sometimes is diminished. And other times it encouraged and inflamed. And, beloved, if there's any time in which our love should be encouraged and inflamed, it's when we come to this table and we take the bread that reminds us of the death and sacrifice of Christ, and we take the cup which reminds us of His blood of the new covenant, that our heart ought to be encouraged to love Him in practical and, I'll use the term, and very emotional terms.

How many of you remember what it was like to fall in love as a teenager? Are there any of you out there that can remember your first passionate, I mean, you kind of got imbalanced.

[6 : 00] Do you remember that? Now, I can tell you that loving my wife after now, how long we've been married, 43 years, I better be careful, but it gets better as it goes along.

I remember, man, it's hard to imagine how good it gets. As you grow in your love and your affection and nurturing that over time really builds on it. And what we are here to do this morning is to nurture and encourage our sense of thankfulness in the Lord Jesus and our affection for Him.

Well, for me to say, I want you to love Christ is to throw a challenge out in front of you that unless it is built upon something and it's established firmly in biblical truth, it's not going to be very substantial, is it?

Let me have you look, and we're taking a journey to get there, but I want you to look at a passage, Psalm 137, just for a moment. Psalm 137 is one of those very repetitious passages in which we find the same truth said over and over again.

Okay? Psalm 136, I'm sorry. It says, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. What's the next line? For His steadfast love endures forever.

[7 : 19] In fact, if you kind of fast forward and work your way through this passage, there is one little set of words that is repeated every single verse. What is it? For His steadfast love endures forever.

And we find that the Spirit of God wants the people of God to remember that His steadfast love endures forever. Now, in conjunction or joined to that statement, which is repeated over and over again, is a recurring path of reminders of different things that Christ has done or that God had done for the Old Testament saint.

And we find application later in the New Testament that we're going to look at. But here is reminder after reminder. How do we know that His steadfast love endures forever? How do we know that? We look at the various illustrations and evidences of it.

And that's what's taking place in Psalm 136. And so here we are this morning. We are coming to a love feast. That means it is a feast in which the principal focus is on the love of Christ.

And I want to encourage you to think carefully and deeply about the love of Christ. And in order to do that, I want you to go to a passage of Scripture and follow with me as we get an understanding of how much Christ loves us and how certain that love is in our life.

[8 : 46] Turn over in your Bibles, if you would, to Romans chapter 8. And we're going to be looking at Romans chapter 8, verse 31 through 39. In order to get the big picture first, I want us to kind of back up and get a broad shot of Romans and then zero in a little bit more on Romans chapter 8.

Romans is a book that is focused in particular on helping us understand the doctrine of grace, the doctrine of salvation, and God's work in bringing us to salvation.

It begins by reminding us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Isn't that right? There is none righteous, no, not one. There's not a one of us that seeks after God.

It goes on to expand and help us understand the doctrine of salvation and that God, in His grace, sent Jesus Christ to die for us and to pay the penalty for our sins. And with undeniable truth, it helps us understand that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord, what?

Shall be saved. Those who trust in Christ receive everlasting life. And then in Romans chapter 8, after having laid out this doctrine that explains the fact that we are saved by the grace of God, He's sending Christ to be the penalty for our sins, it explains the certainty, the absolute certainty of our salvation.

[10:04] If we've come to believe in Christ, how certain are we that we're going to end up in heaven? We're absolutely certain. And Romans chapter 8 kind of lays that out for us and helps us understand. It begins in Romans chapter 8 verse 1 by making this statement, there is now what?

No condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. And we find there that it begins with that statement of no condemnation, and it closes off at the end of the chapter with that little statement, there is no separation.

And over through the entire chapter, there is one affirmation after another of the absolute certainty that in Christ Jesus, we who know Him have no fear, we have no anxiety or defeat that we should anticipate.

I do find it a little hard to hurry over this passage today, but I recognize that our goal is the Lord's table. It's not to deal with the exposition of this passage that we have looked at on more than one occasion, but I want to use this text in order to inform, in order to encourage you to think deeply about the significance of the love of Christ.

And so let's kind of take a broad sweep of the chapter and recognize in verse 1 through 4, Paul outlines how Christ delivered us from the penalty of sin, and then in verses 5 through 14, we find that Christ has delivered us from the power of sin, not only the penalty, but also the power.

[11:28] Furthermore, in verses 16 through 25, we find that we are encouraged to recognize that we have incredible blessings being God's children. Do you recognize the privilege and the blessing of being God's child?

Stop and think about it. He who inhabits eternity, who created everything with mere words, cares about you personally, and thinks about you as His own. You are His child.

In fact, if you were to go over in 1 John chapter 3, it says this, Behold what manner of love the Father has for us, that we should be what? We should be called the sons of God.

And here in Romans chapter 8, verse 16 through 25, we are explained the absolute blessing that we have in being God's children. In verses 26 and 27, Paul comforts us by reminding us of the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives and His help.

And then in verse 28 through 39, Paul concludes this great chapter of encouragement by affirming in our lives that everything works together for good to them who are called according to His purposes and are part of His plan.

[12:41] And so we remind ourselves, man, we are incredibly blessed. Now, it's in that broad backdrop of what God has done for us in saving us that we pick up and look at these verses in verse 31 through 39.

And I want you to look at them and remind yourself here that what we find here is a set of questions that are rhetorical. Now, what is a rhetorical question? It's a question that really isn't asking a question out of curiosity, but it's a question that is asked to emphasize something.

It's a question that is leading us to recognize, hey, that's an obvious fact and should be part of our focus. How many of you have used rhetorical questions with your children to make a point?

Should you take your plate to the sink after you've finished eating? And the answer is what? Duh. Yeah. It's what I may...

Should you clean up your room? Yeah. The answer is obvious. And a rhetorical question is designed not to stir curiosity, but to emphasize a fact.

[13:49] And what we find here is Paul relies upon this flow of questions to drive home the point that we have this blessed relationship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And right at the very heart of that is that he loves us unconditionally. He loves us unconditionally. I want you to recognize as we think about these questions, just kind of flow with me as we work our way and we'll come back to them a little more.

But the first question is this, is if God is for us, who can be against us? If God is for us, who can be against us? And the answer is what? Well, if God's on our side, case closed.

Secondly, if Jesus died for us, who is the one who is going to condemn us? And I remind you, if you have worked your way through the book of Revelation as we did earlier as a fellowship, remember who the judge of the whole earth is?

Who is it? It's Jesus Christ. And if Jesus Christ is the one who is for us, he is our advocate, and he is also the one who's the judge of the whole earth.

[14:51] And if the judge of the whole earth is our advocate, is anyone going to bring a charge against us? And the answer is no, no one's going to do that. Who is going to accuse us?

No one, because Christ is our advocate. And if Christ is our Savior, remind yourself again who is going to condemn us. And so the last question that we come in the flow of these things here is, who is going to separate us from the love of Christ?

And that's the question that we want to spend a couple minutes on this morning as we think about this carefully. First, I want you to recognize that that last question, who is going to separate us from the love of Christ, is the highest and most forceful proof that Paul offers to us of our sweet relationship with Christ.

He loves us, and he will never turn away from us. I want you to recognize that in your own life this morning as you think about, well, so what is it that really prompts me to have a love for Christ?

How many of you recognize it's commanded? It is. How many of you recognize your own frailty in loving him? We do. We have that difficulty. So what is it that feeds and encourages us and strengthens us in loving Christ?

[16:09] It is his love for us that prompts us to have the right love of Christ. And keep that in your mind. It says over in the Scriptures in 1 John, it says, We love him. Why?

Because he first loved us. And so when we think about the responsibility we have of loving him, and we think about the responsibility of coming to this table and having this table encourage us in loving him, we recognize that it's not something that we kind of sit down here and say, All right, I've got to love Christ.

I like him. Oh, yeah, I love him. And we have some automatic emotions about loving Christ. How many of you have ever tried that? Stirring your emotions just by brute emotional force.

How does that work? It doesn't. Our emotions follow our understanding of the blessing of Christ's love for us.

Can I have you recognize that? Our emotions follow our understanding of the love that Christ has for us. And our emotions grow out of our grasp of who he is and what he has done for us.

[17:22] Let me have you look just for a moment, and I am not by any stretch of the imagination giving away all that we're going to study when we get to the text. But turn in your Bible, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 3.

Ephesians chapter 3. Beginning there, in verse 14, Paul says this, For this cause I bow the knee in prayer.

And he says, I'm going to pray about this thing because it's really important, and you work your way through that we would have the power of the Spirit of God to help us be strengthened in the inner man, that we might have Christ dwell in us, stable and secure.

We're going to talk about that next week. And then as it goes on and says here, that we would be filled with all the fullness of God. How is that? That we would understand, there in verse 19, that we would understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we would have this grasp of what he has done for us.

So we need the Spirit's power to understand his love, and that sense of love really flows out of who he is and what he's done for us. And that is what Paul is reminding us of, particularly in this Romans passage.

[18:39] He says, what can separate us from the love of Christ? He loves us. He'll never turn away from us. Second, Paul uses these rhetorical questions to affirm Christ's unfailing love.

Some of you have friends that believe that salvation is something that can be lost and rediscovered. Lost and rediscovered. You can lose your salvation. You can be saved again.

My darling wife grew up in an environment in which every year they had revival services, and it was very regular that there were individuals who every year had reconversions.

They would get saved again. There is no need to be saved again, because once you are saved, guess what? You are moved from death to life. You are moved by the grace of God from where you were as a condemned sinner to now being part of his family, and you are absolutely secure.

And one of the arguments against the idea of you continuing to lose your salvation and then discover it again is the fact that these rhetorical questions are not questions to challenge our salvation, but to assure us of the certainty of our salvation.

[19 : 50] Paul would not ask questions such as, well, if God's for you, who can be against you, if he was trying to challenge you to think, well, God may be against you. He would not ask the question of, so what is Jesus going to do in condemning you if he was intending to challenge you to think, well, no, no, no, he's the one who's on your side.

He wouldn't be asking that kind of rhetorical question if he was trying to drive home the point that you have reason to be uncertain in your salvation. I want you to recognize that Paul, as he works his way through this series of passages, as speaks about the love of Christ, he is reminding us over and over again that Christ is on our side.

It comes to a kind of a climax in verse 35, and look at it there if you would. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Now let me ask you a question. How many of you felt separated before? Anybody here felt separated from the love of Christ? Come on, raise your hands. All of us have felt separated from the love of Christ. Why? Principally because of what's going on in our own life. Isn't that right? Some of us have felt separated when things haven't gone our way. If Jesus loves me, it wouldn't be so bad. Surprise. Because he loves you, he allows bad things to come in your life to do what?

[21 : 10] I love what it says in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 10. He says, He disciplines us that we might be partakers of his holiness. When he brings the hurt to us, it is so that we can grow in grace.

And there's not a one of you here who would not look over the years of your life and have to admit that the best lessons you've learned, you've always learned in the shadows and in the valleys. Nothing separates us from the love of Christ. And I'm humbled when I stop and realize that God has been at work in my life and in your life, and he is working to show his unchanging love for us, and he is doing it for his glory and our good.

Well, then we come to verse 37, and he says this, Back up just for a minute so you don't miss the context here.

Remember in verse 35 it says, And who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And immediately in the back of our mind when we think about, Man, it's neat. Christ loves me. We stop and then immediately come to verse 36, and it says, For your sake we're being killed all day long.

[22 : 29] What's that have to do with love? I mean, if he loved me, everything would be what? Everything would be easy. How many of you on occasion have, you remember as little children saying, If you loved me, you would let me go do such and such, play in the street, you know, have a cell phone, whatever.

You know, there are things that we assume that if our parents loved us, they would do what we want. Am I right? And Paul, as he is working his way through this passage, he says, Listen, we're not going to be separated from the love of Christ.

There's nothing that's going to happen that's going to cause that separation to take place. And then he rattles off all these bad things. And, oh, how come bad things happen? Paul then answers that question.

He says, Hey, listen, because we're his children, hard times come. But then he caps it off by saying there in verse 37, No, and in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The text is not speaking about a hope but a certainty. We are fact. We are conquerors in Christ, not potentially, but in reality.

[23 : 40] And then Paul tops that off with a closing list of things that are even grander in their challenge and question for us. And let me read through those things here.

He says, For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, how complete is that list? It is absolutely all-encompassing. Death, life, angels, rulers. And to the ancient world, they were very, very sensitive to the reality of angels and the idea that angels could interfere or that the government could interfere.

I read this last week of some of the things that are going on in our government in relationship to our faith as believers, and I recognize that adversity is coming for us. But I want to tell you something.

What our government would do against us is not something that would separate us from the love of God. Not at all. And here Paul, as he swings through this grand display of the challenges that we might face in life, he caps it off by saying this.

[24 : 59] Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. What are we here to do today? We are here to take a little piece of bread and a little glass of juice.

I want to explain that that bread and juice is not the real body of Christ. These elements are a reminder.

They are symbolic. They point to what Christ did when he died for us on the cross. And as we take that bread and we take that cup, what we are to do is sit there and think of the blessing we have in being his children.

I want you to think just for a moment. How blessed was it the moment you came to Christ? Do you remember that? Do you remember the freedom of forgiveness and the joy that flooded your life when you realized that you had been lifted from the place of death and condemnation into everlasting life?

You had been delivered from the burden and the shame and the guilt and the suffering that sin brings. And you've been made the child of God. I want you to know that as you take that bread and you take that element this morning, I would encourage you to with humility ask God to give to you a sense again of the love of Christ.

[26 : 33] Are you listening? God delights in answering biblical prayers. Do you realize that? Does he want you to grow in your love for Christ?

And what's the answer? Yes. Yeah. And will you grow in your love for Christ? You just kind of sit there like a lump and say, well, I wonder if Pastor can finish this off in 12 minutes.

I've got something else to do. No. You plead with him and say, Lord, will you please stir my heart to be sensitive to the love of Christ? In the passage in 1 Corinthians, it says that we are not to take these elements carelessly.

And so I would remind you, first of all, that if you're here today and do not know Christ, that to take the bread and to take the cup in one sense is to actually bear public testimony that you're a Christian.

And if you're here today and you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, I would encourage you to take one of two paths. If you are here under the convicting power of the Spirit of God and you recognize that you stand justly condemned before God and you want forgiveness for all of your sins and you want Christ as your Savior, now is the hour of salvation.

[27 : 51] And you can ask him right where you sit. I need Christ to save me and I want him to do it now. And I would encourage you to take those elements, knowing Christ as your Savior.

If you're here this morning and you're a believer, but there is that concern and burden in your life because there's unconfessed sin, attitudes that you've had towards another brother, or secret sin that you've got compartmentalized over in the corner of your life, and there's that dark and ugly part of your heart, and you are not ready to come to this table and say, Look, I come as a believer who loves Christ, and all of my life displays that.

I would encourage you to quietly confess that right where you are. And then as the elements are being passed, to take that bread and take that cup, and as you are taking them to say, Thank you, Jesus, for dying for me, and thank you, Jesus, for loving me.

I wouldn't mind if you said that out loud. Let me tell you, in the Greek text, the idea is that we do show forth.

In other words, we say, I do this to remind myself of what Jesus has done for me. And I would encourage you, as you take that bread and take that cup, at the very least, I am thankful that I am Christ's child, that He died for me.

[29 : 11] And I am thankful that I know Him as my Savior. I'm going to ask that the men would come as we come to this Lord's table. And as we're taking these elements, let's just take a moment and pray together and just ask God to give us a clear conscience as we come to this table.

Our precious God and Father, this morning we come to you with humility and recognize the frailty of our hearts. How quickly we allow things that are offensive to you to color our hearts and disposition. How quickly we become indifferent to the matters of sin. And we would ask this morning that your Spirit would work in us because we recognize that apart from the enabling of the Spirit of God, we are very, very prone to be pretty dead to sin.

Convict us of those unconfessed matters that we need to confess now. Give to us sincere and repentant spirits. Lord, that as we take this bread and take this cup, we might with a clear conscience say, Jesus is my Savior and my delight, my passion, is to live in such a fashion that I say thank you to the one who loves me.

We ask this in your precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[31 : 23] desde desde desde Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. And when he'd given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Amen. Amen.

[35 : 54] Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. In the same way, he also took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. Saving my soul.

Thank you, Lord, for making me whole. Thank you, Lord, for giving to me thy great salvation so rich and free.

[39 : 03] Listen as I read in verse 26. For as often as you eat this bread and you drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he come.

There's another party coming.

And you who know Christ, you know what it says in Revelation chapter 19? It says, blessed are all those who are called to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

You proclaim the Lord's death till this is only temporary. The best is yet to come.

And you who are Christians here today who know Christ should have a heart that says, bring it on, Jesus. Come back soon.

[40 : 19] And you who don't know Christ, I would plead with you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. Don't let your stubborn heart, the pride of your life interfere with the sweetness of the gospel that announces God judges sin.

And poured his wrath out on Jesus that whosoever believes in him should have what? Everlasting life. And if you're here today and you need Christ, catch me afterwards.

Talk to any one of these men. And there are women, godly people in our fellowship, many ready to talk to you in a heartbeat. Let's close in prayer. Lord Jesus, what we do today is a reminder of what you've done for us.

It's understandable why this is called the love feast. Scripture tells us there's no greater love than when a man is willing to die for another.

And you were willing to die for us. To satisfy the judgment and the wrath of God. And we who know you.

[41 : 40] Have this reminder stir our affections for you. Lord, a love that's genuine ends up being a love that's obedient.

And we want to be a people that don't just talk about loving Jesus but act like it. Through your power and for your glory. Amen.

Amen. Amen.