

Innocence Put to Grief - Communion service

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again to our reading in Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 53.

You might read verse 10. Particularly these first words, Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. And so on. I want to try thinking this morning briefly about the notion of justice.

And by way of contrast, there is, of course, human injustice. Something that we're all very familiar with, the days that we're living in. It's always been the case.

Since sin entered the world, that there was injustice. And we can see it in different ways, at different levels in life.

[1 : 0 8] Younger people will be able maybe to identify, even themselves maybe to relate in life, with how difficult it is to see, or even more difficult to experience injustice, whether it's a false accusation, or whether it's looking at what's happening all around, and the way the world is functioning, and how things so often seem to be going wrong.

And people can have massive, massive questions about God, thinking about life. Thinking about how God seems to leave things undone.

And he doesn't seem being the key word, to intervene and to put things right. How many of the Psalms describe the people of God praying for divine intervention, and for God to put everything right?

Psalms 37 stands out for the psalmist going through these experiences of injustice, and knowing what to do about them, and giving us the guidance, and the instruction how to wait on the Lord, and to keep his way, and that he will bring forth suffering people's vindication, their right, like the noonday sun.

It'll be clear. It'll be obvious. That'll happen one day, but you know yourselves, when you look around and see the injustice, particularly around the death of Christ, the human injustice.

[2 : 3 9] We were singing of it in Psalm 22, and there in 69, how the Lord felt. But I don't think there was ever such a time in human history where there was such a miscarriage of justice like this.

We hear of miscarriages of justice. You can hear of, I saw something just the other day about someone there who'd spent 10 plus years in prison, had spent 10 plus years on parole, and was doing everything possible to clear his name.

In America, that is, of something he was accused of having done that he never did. And it was a policeman who was quite renowned for nailing people just for the sake of it.

And it was years later, witnesses came forward and testified and said that they were forced into their confessions and that this man was actually innocent. He was set free, as others have been.

But you put yourself in the position, if possible, of that man through the first interview with police all the way through, ended up in court, facing sentencing, and how many years of your life behind bars when you know you didn't do it all along.

[3 : 57] How someone survives that mentally is quite a thought. To be strong and to be resilient and to come through that. When we think about the death of our Lord, some people might think about his death as being, on the one hand, which it is, the greatest miscarriage of justice in human history.

It was so distorted, it was so false. The claims were baseless, when you think about them and read them. And the accusation of blasphemy, all that's written, you can see they were just grasping at straws, looking for anything that they could use to bring the sentence of death.

And so on one level, when you think about it, was there ever such a coming together of opposites in the world to unite in their shared and single purpose of seeking to crucify the Lord of glory?

Whenever did the Gentiles or Romans, non-Jews, and the Jews, and the Sadducees, and the Pharisees with their divisions, theological and cultural and so on, when did they come together with centurions and with all the people of Jerusalem with one shared purpose, any onlooker would think this is justice being done, when it's not, as you know very well.

Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? John MacArthur has an amazing book with a very thought-provoking title, *The Murder of Jesus*.

[5 : 34] The first hand, it makes you shudder to think about it in these terms. But one, the human side of it, I think the Bible makes it very clear that that's what it was.

It's not that he was taken against his will, it was impossible. But before, what we read, Pilate was trying to exercise and exert his authority over our Lord when met with a silence, he said, you not know that I have power to condemn you and power to release you?

And he said, you could have no authority over me unless it were given to you from above. So the one who has delivered me to you has committed the greater sin. Our Lord is being brought before Pilate.

Pilate is going to pass the sentence. We read of that in John. The Jews couldn't do that. The religious body couldn't exercise the death penalty themselves, and so they got this man, Pilate, to do it.

Was Pilate responsible? For the death of Jesus. Were the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus? That has gone down through history wrongly as an accusation against them and as an excuse for their mistreatment down through the ages.

[6 : 50] Was it Judas Iscariot who was responsible? Everyone has a part to play, don't they? Herod was even involved in this, and Herod's men liked to have a bit of a game with him.

Was it the Romans, the soldiers who killed him? It was also unjust from beginning to end.

Some people might look as well, you may yourself think about the cross, the sufferings of Jesus, and see the injustice, and it might get to you. Some people have struggled maybe with thinking about this before they were Christians and feeling so moved as seeing someone who was the greatest example of what is right and good, the greatest communicator of divine truth, to be treated so harshly and to be so misused by everyone around him.

And it can move people as though he was a religious leader who had so many great ideals, but it just failed. And his movement seemed to come to an end. At least the Jews hoped any would come to an end with him.

But it's looking from one perspective, isn't it? To look at the cross and to think about everyone who was involved, even to think about our own sins.

[8 : 12] You've maybe heard that before, that it was our sins, some have said, that nailed him to the cross. It wasn't. There's a lot more to it.

Isaiah 53 provides so much of the teaching and the basis that explains Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and explains to us what's happening behind the scenes.

Because from the outside, people are thinking that he is, this is verse 4, the end of verse 4, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

So you don't suffer like this. You don't go through judgment like this unless God is against you. And as it's quoted in Galatians, echoing Deuteronomy, I think, where it says, cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree.

The picture is of crucifixion being symbolic of being under divine judgment. And so if this man is hanging on a tree symbolically cursed, then, as Isaiah 53, 4 says, we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

[9 : 23] Now he was, of course, as the rest of the chapter says, he was stricken and smitten by God, but not for his own sin. It wasn't punishment for his own wrongdoing.

This is what the Jews were looking at and thinking. Well, it's caught up with him. And they were very happy about that. But it really was God himself the word isn't responsible.

Like we think of people who are responsible for committing something or doing something that carries consequences with it that they have to sort out, like injustice, passing the wrong sentence and so on.

We're told, emphatically, are we not, that in verse 10, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He, we're told, has put him to grief.

A transaction, in other words, is taking place between father and son. Hidden largely from the observers, even Mary, our Lord's mother, looking on and the rest of the disciples looking on, they didn't really understand.

[10 : 33] They didn't fully know it was taking place. Afterwards, it became clear. But one thing the scripture highlights for us is that while humanly it was such a terribly unjust thing for the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified.

The Corinthians are told about the fact that they did it in ignorance, which doesn't excuse what they did. A mitigating factor, maybe, but it doesn't excuse it. But there is in that letter to 1 Corinthians in chapter 2 the description given of the knowledge God communicates of the truth.

And so the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind, gives us understanding. The Bible begins to make sense. It all begins to fall into place. Not everything, but what's necessary.

And when that begins to take place and when the eyes are gradually opened, like in Acts 2, we'll see, God willing, later on, the situation where people coming to a realization of what they've done, realizing, the Corinthians are told, that these people, the rulers of this age, people in authority, Herod and Pilate, the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jews, they did not have this knowledge.

It isn't a wisdom that man's wisdom teaches. But the explanation is given that had they known what they were doing, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

[12 : 06] So they were responsible. And Acts 2 highlights that they were responsible. You have taken him, Peter says in his sermon, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain him.

So there is the responsibility. But he says before that, there in Acts 2, that he was, our Lord was delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God.

The whole verse flows like that. Him being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God. You have taken, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, who therefore is responsible.

How can Peter, on the one hand, say to the Jews that you have crucified him and at the same time say that he was crucified as a result of the Father delivering him up in the historical fulfillment of his eternal counsel?

Well, the thing is, we don't search for because we will never find a satisfactory explanation. People look at these opposites of our responsibility and divine sovereignty.

[13 : 17] They look at them as opposites when they're not. They just meet where we cannot understand. And they resolve themselves in God's wisdom and in God's purpose.

But isn't it liberating and somewhat exhilarating to think about the cross as the fulfillment of God's divine, the Father's divine plan? Not something that was an accident, not something that had any possibilities about it, but something that was definite and something that was sure, but the reason behind it.

The Lord, we're told, in the end of verse 6, has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Our Lord was personally innocent.

He was representatively guilty. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. And he took our iniquity doesn't mean that the, of course, it isn't the actual sin, it's the guilt, the resulting penalty, not the defilement, impossible, that cannot be transferred, not the feeling of guilt, but the actual guilt, the liability to punishment, being held accountable and being held responsible to pay the price for all of these sins as though they were his very own.

I don't think there's a human parallel for trying to understand imputation that is heroic, there are, of course, heroic acts of deeds. We hear of them from some of the wars where one would risk their lives, limbs, for comrades, put yourself in the way of danger and, you know, do heroic deeds in order to look after and save other people around you who may be more vulnerable.

[15 : 07] But this is, of course, unique. The situation here is of complete identification, total identification.

He has made him, the Father has made the Son to be sin for us who knew no sin that we, the other hand of it, may become the righteousness of God in him.

What does that mean? He has made him to be sin for us. I think Isaiah 53 explains it. The imputation, the crediting of righteousness to our empty account and the imputing of our sin to our Lord both become, through the transfer involved, it was called imputation, they both become a personal reality in the sense that when our Lord is described here as, and again in Psalm 69, he said, I'm forced, I'm forced to repay what I didn't take.

The idea is of what he is being held accountable for, that he wasn't personally guilty of in the sense that he didn't commit the crime.

He didn't commit the sin. We're told in the Bible it's impossible, but he is the one who's going to pay the price for that sin. How is that going to be possible?

[16 : 36] Well, God is the one we've sinned against, and the justice of God is something that cries for punishment. The soul that sins must die.

There's no flexibility in it. There's no twisting God's arm with any amount of any good works or deeds or anything we'd possibly do. No religion, nothing. It's impossible either for ourselves, it would be impossible for all the angels of heaven to begin to begin offering a sacrifice that would begin to be acceptable to God.

It had to be God himself. None but God could pay the price that was owed to God. It's beyond human calculation.

There's no human parallel. It's even beyond that of the angels. This is in a realm and in a situation where we really cannot go. Thankfully, we cannot go. But we're told enough about it to come to communion grasping onto the fact, no matter how we feel, but grasping onto the fact that the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

If you're carrying and I'm carrying that sense and that awareness, not maybe of actual sins, can be the case, of course, but the fact that you're a sinner, a wretched man, wretched woman, that sense that we can sometimes have of struggling with the weight of indwelling sin and its power and its deception and our susceptibility to different things.

[18 : 14] Like that woman we thought of last night, we don't come feeling worthy or deserving. It's not that you spend six months getting yourself ready for the next communion. It's not even that the communion is a higher Sabbath than any other.

it's special. Absolutely. But we ask ourselves the attitude we have when we're coming.

What is our hope this morning? It isn't that we feel worthy. It isn't that we feel better. It isn't that we feel we have earned it.

It's the opposite, isn't it? It's not that you spend the six months doing or thinking or saying whatever. Every day should be the same for us, seeking the Lord and seeking to walk in His ways and to put right what's wrong where that's possible.

But coming just now can be something that might come with hesitation and trepidation and it's not something because traditionally people have done it. They get all solemn at communion time.

[19 : 22] It can be a real thing. And the more we appreciate our own personal sin, which like we're saying, it's not the things. We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners.

It's a nature we have, isn't it? It's that within us a fountain our Lord describes the heart as being a fountain of wickedness. Jeremiah describes the heart of man being deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, saying, who can know it?

Well, we don't know our hearts, but we know enough of it. Don't we? To be thankful that we're not coming here today in our own standing, in our own righteousness, with our own attainments, but that we can gladly come before God like that woman last night, sometimes even with tears and admitting with sincerity that we have nothing to offer Him.

We'll see that in just a minute when we come to fence the table together. We have nothing to give. I think that's where He wants us to be. For us to get past trying to impress or trying to earn, because we're religiously geared, we have that about us, do this and live.

There's a covenant of works mentality, a works mentality that carries over into our Christian lives where we think we have to earn God's favor in the sense that while we may, of course, experience receive blessing, those who honor Him, He will honor, but there's also the side, is there not, where it's all as a result of receiving what He's done.

[21 : 01] And we look and we see the injustice out there all around us. And you know how it feels, every one of us, you see what's happening in politics, see what's happening in police, and say all the corruptions all being rooted out now, it's been there for long enough, and it's been allowed to fester and grow for decades, but once it hits the press, there you go, they can fix it, they can start nailing people and everything.

That's injustice. The justice would have been sorting these things as soon as they became known, wouldn't it? But then you look at yourself, all of these things, they fade into nothingness in relation to God above.

You see yourself and you think at times of that unworthiness. It's like the Puritan John Bradford. One occasion he was in a line where there used to be someone, when we read of what John was telling us of the procession to the cross, where the public executions would be held and there would be public hangings.

A criminal one occasion was being led and there would be the public gathering to see the procession. And this John Bradford, what he said, the people maligned the Puritans. The term Puritan, as you'll know, wasn't something to commend them, it was a criticism.

Well, there's the pure ones, there's the holier ones. They were just trying to please God the best they could and trying to be as faithful to His word as they could and other people didn't want that and so they thought they criticized them.

[22 : 31] But anyway, here you've got this man who is viewed as being so right and proper and everything but what he said and it's written about him seeing this man, he says, there goes John Bradford except for the grace of God.

He knew himself enough to know that there's a man on his way to be hung, to be going through capital punishment for something that Bradford knew that he was capable of himself apart from the grace of God.

We're not here to look at anyone else. And when God is working in us more and more, the less concerned we'll be with that again last night. We'll not be concerned what people think.

It doesn't mean we don't care what they think but it means God knows my motives, God knows my reasons. Even coming forward can be hard in a community, can't it?

People can misunderstand you or misrepresent you and talk about you. It doesn't matter. It shouldn't. The fear of man brings a snare. For us it's to come and to remember with that gladness that he isn't telling us to bring anything.

[23 : 43] He's telling us to come to him and to come to his table with that remembrance of him that he has done it. The Father has done it, has provided a perfect substitute.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was our guilt bearer. There's a difference between the feeling of guilt and the reality of guilt.

You can feel guilty for something you've not done. You can be made to feel guilty. And you can feel guilty when you've done something and realizing responsibility.

But when something wrong is done, there's the consciousness, the awareness of having done wrong. We call it a guilty conscience. That inside monitor, that something inside us that's telling us that was wrong.

You shouldn't have done this. When David numbered the people, interestingly, I think it's the King's account, the Samuel account, describes the Lord moving him.

[24 : 53] Get this the right way around, maybe the other way around, but then we're told, we're told in the Chronicles account that it was Satan who tempted him. Both are through sovereignty and God using, in that instance, fallen angel to fulfill his purposes.

But when David numbered the people, he shouldn't have done it, that's the point. The thing is, when David did it, we're told that his heart smote him. Same as when he went to cut off the corner of King Saul's robe.

Injustice was crying out against King David prior to his formally taking the throne. And there was his enemy in the cave, relieving himself as David and his men were behind.

And David's friends are saying, now's your chance. The Lord has delivered your enemy into your hand. David knew it wasn't the case. Hard providence to understand. But when he went to cut part of Saul's robe, his conscience condemned him.

His heart smote him. That feeling was impossible for our Lord. I know others maybe disagree, but, you know, it's so good to talk about and be able to discuss these things.

[25 : 58] But a consciousness or an awareness of guilt that he was, an awareness that he was the sin bearer, knowing his own identity and sharing that with people as he journeyed and as he taught with them.

They didn't understand it. Peter, on one occasion, took him aside and tried to rebuke him, saying, this will never happen to you. You're never going to be crucified. But the Lord explained. And here he comes to the cross, the awareness of the load he's carrying becomes more and more real.

And it must have been something even for the disciples to see him different. The way he would speak to them, the way he would engage with them from the upper room and following.

Around the time of the betrayal, there is a change. John really, I think, emphasizes that. You see, when Satan is cast out of the upper room, that something happens to the Lord.

He's, in his spirit, he's elevated. At the end of John's account, you see, combining the four accounts, when Judas goes out, the Lord's spirit seems to lift. There was a darkness. There was an oppression in the upper room until Judas was sent out.

[27 : 13] All of these things, the disciples must have wondered. You can imagine them wondering. Or maybe they weren't. You maybe think they weren't. They were oblivious to so much. They fell asleep at the Garden of Gethsemane.

Fell asleep on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John. So what's to say they would notice anything? You'd pick up on things. You know when someone's not themselves. The more you know them, you can tell. There's something wrong.

And the Lord would sometimes be showing and sharing. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this reason I came to this hour.

Father, glorify your name. John's parallel, it would seem, of Gethsemane in terms of the prayer, but the awareness, the awareness coming over him.

The nearer he came to the cross, and in Gethsemane particularly, someone has described it, the darkness, the darkness of Gethsemane was but the shadow of Calvary.

[28 : 16] And that shadow carried such a way to the point as in the garden did he not say, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass.

You know, the theologians have had such debates over the meaning of these words, and we try to engage with them one with another and think about them at times. And maybe because of out of love and respect for the Lord, we try and explain these words possibly even a way.

But when we stop and consider his request, he knows why he's there. He knows why on the cross when he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Not asking for information. Some say it's an exclamation. How you have forsaken me? I think it's a question, but what a question from such a person. But here he is in this situation carrying our sin, carrying our guilt, being held personally responsible, where the Father lays on him the iniquity of us all, and that perfect identification, and the gradual awareness of what's coming his way, more and more the depth of the feeling and the wrestling and the struggling.

We can get Semeny, even Luke, telling us that his sweat was like great drops of blood. What was he saying? Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass.

[29 : 49] Someone has put it, trying to put it this way. Is there any other way? Not that he's not wanting to go through or that he's hesitating with fulfilling his Father's will, but it's looking into, as it were, the cup.

He describes a cup looking into what he has to consume, what he has to go through and experience. The cup that my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?

This is resolved after. At the time where he's in Gethsemane wrestling, the Lord is, the Father is allowing the reality of the cross to, but not that he didn't know beforehand, but there is the sense of the realization of knowledge.

What is, you know the difference between that. You try and imagine a scene. We can get it so wrong, we assume we know what someone else is thinking because of what they're doing or because someone's going through a different situation.

We assume we understand how they feel. We can't sympathize. We can't really get alongside someone unless we've been there. And there is that sense where our Lord, in the uniqueness of his situation, is beginning, it would seem, as he approaches Gethsemane.

[31 : 11] The upper room, the upper room is, in many ways, a high point. John's account, chapter 13 through 17. But as he leaves and comes to Gethsemane, it becomes very heavy.

If it be possible, let this cup pass. A way consistent with divine justice. There wasn't another way.

But the enormity of the struggle, our Lord, there with the consciousness of carrying our guilt, meaning that the sentence, our sin deserves, he was about to pay.

Humanly, it looked so unjust, but in reality, it was the perfect expression of divine justice. the question we're having, we think just now, there's one side of it as we come together and reflect upon his death.

Let's remember that he has carried all our sin, all of its guilt. Someone remember they were teaching us and saying that our Lord's death will keep his people from going to hell.

[32 : 37] But his life has earned their way to heaven. There's two sides to this, isn't there? What's referred to as imputation or of accounting another to be in the position of someone else?

We are the sinners, we are the unjust, we are the unrighteous, and he is the one who became the just, stood in the place for the unjust that he might reconcile us to God. His life was also a life of obedience rendered to God in our behalf.

When he was to be, when our Lord was with John the Baptist, doesn't Matthew bring that before us? How John was saying, I've got need to be baptized by you. And the shock of the invitation for our Lord to be baptized by John the Baptist.

It isn't, of course, that our Lord needed repentance like the rest did. But our Lord says to John that it's necessary that we must fulfill all righteousness.

It was an act of obedience, fulfilling God's will. He did everything. I don't know how you feel about that just now when you think, you think about his death.

[34 : 04] He says, remember me. this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me. Remembering him.

Remembering that he has stood in that place. That he has carried that guilt. That he has paid that penalty. But also that his life has been lived for you.

When he says, as John reminds us, chapter 19, it is finished. It is everything that is finished. Imagine for a moment only your unconverted sins were forgiven and you had to work your way hereafter to get to heaven.

He has left nothing for you to do. He has left absolutely nothing. People who abuse the teaching will say, well let us, Romans 6, continue in sin that grace may abound.

If my sin is going to emphasize God's mercy, well let's just go down that road and the more mercy I receive, the more God will be glorified. That's not the reasoning. The Christian will understand the glory of forgiveness and will worship God for that very fact that all of these sins are forgiven.

[35 : 19] But that this morning you don't even need to worry and I don't need to worry with you of trying to impress God with anything. and impresses the word.

Because there's that Pharisee inside us who like in the Pharisee and the tax collector like to tell God how good he was. The tax collector he wouldn't so much as lift his eyes to heaven but he said God be merciful to me the sinner.

And you know which one went home justified, which one was pronounced righteous and which one was pronounced just. It's the one who realized and confessed his own sin.

He has made him to be sin for us who knew no sin. The other side that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Imputation, our sin imputed to him. The father laid on him the iniquity of us all. But also the life or the righteousness or the perfect obedience of our Lord is also imputed to the people of God by faith so that the righteousness of his life, that perfect obedience that he fulfilled in his life becomes yours.

[36 : 47] doesn't mean as some would say that in justification God then looks upon us and only sees his son and doesn't see our sin anymore. That's not true. He teaches us to ask for forgiveness in the Lord's prayer, doesn't he?

There's many other places you can think of. Justification isn't something that affects our character. Sanctification changes us. Justification brings us into a right standing with God, one of peace, where all our sins are forgiven and we are viewed by, held by, and dealt with by God legally on the basis of his son's perfection.

These are concepts that we read of them and they're beyond us. Romans 5 1 as an example about justification, we then have peace with God, and so on and so forth.

It's finding that place with the Lord, isn't it? It's being in that position before him where we can let go of absolutely everything that we might rely on to find peace with him.

And this morning it's saying in our hearts, from our hearts, it's all about him. It's nothing to do with us. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[38 : 09] It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief, divine justice standing out. We'll pray just now as we wait upon God.

Let's pray. Lord our God, as we try to consider these things, we need that emphasis and power and reality the Holy Spirit alone can bring to us.

And so for guidance and for leading into your word more and more each day, and at this time, may your blessing be upon us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This part of the service is often described as the fencing of the Lord's table for different reasons. But we know that whatever the terminology conjures up, the Lord does set very clearly show guidelines for what he would expect and require of us in coming to his table.

The first place we really come across that is in 1 Corinthians 11, where the Lord himself made it very clear who he wanted at the table in Corinth and who he didn't. The problem, as you remember, in Corinth was, unlike meeting in a church building like this today, they'd meet in homes.

[39 : 30] And after meeting for worship, they would then celebrate the Lord's supper in the home. So you'd gather like that. The problem was, and 1 Corinthians 11 shows a very clearly, that people who had wine and bread to bring brought it, but consumed it themselves, which meant what was meant to symbolize the Lord's body and the Lord's blood was being completely, not just blurred, the distinction and the emphasis being blurred, but abused.

And so in the Corinth, many people were dying and others were falling ill. Doesn't mean that every death and every illness is divine affliction, of course not. Thankfully.

Think of Job and it's one of these examples. His friends got it all wrong about his sufferings. But in Corinth, the people were very emphatically under God's hand.

So he was taking people away from the table. It's frightening, isn't it? They think of it like that. But if we think of it like that, we think of ourselves and think, well, how on earth can I come to this table?

You know yourself. I know myself. We don't know, as Jeremiah said, we don't know our hearts as they are. We know enough. We know enough to know that the reason we're here is not to make any statement.

[40 : 51] It's not to do anything in front of other people for its own sake. It's for him. He says, remember us. He says to us, remember me. do this in remembrance of me and we want to try.

I'm thinking about that part in Corinth, but how do I know if I'm going to do this the right way or the wrong way? The unworthiness in Corinth was their abusing the elements that the bread and the wine were being overindulged in.

The distinction between the common and the sacred was lost. The centrality of the cross was nowhere to be found. It's not that there was unworthiness in the Christians' lives or that they'd slipped up here or there, and therefore God was judging them because they were unfit to be at the table.

It's not saying that at all. It doesn't mean it isn't true, that we need to be very careful that if we're aware of known sin, even if it's something that you alone might be conscious of, it's something not that you've confessed or not that you're struggling with, it's another issue, but something you're indulging, something that you're happy with, and something that you want to be in your life.

Now, you'll know what that is, and I'll know what that is. But if you're coming with that sincerity of heart, confessing your sins, and resting completely on Jesus, you're safe.

[42 : 22] In Micah 6, there's just a few verses. verses. Verse 6, with what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Do you feel like that? There is something about us that while we don't earn, we want to give. Some people would misunderstand the woman in tears in Luke 7, they'd misunderstand her motives.

Even the disciples did with Mary, remember, Martha and Lazarus' brother. They got on to her for not selling, rather than wasting it like this.

They didn't understand what she was doing. But that doesn't mean we don't come with anything. The question we have is what can I come with? Here the picture is in Micah 6, with what shall I come?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I even give my firstborn for my transgression?

[43 : 23] The fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul? What can I give to him? Do you feel there's something missing, that something that you want to give?

Well, he says this, he has told you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? Summed up, do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

justice. You want what is right everywhere, even when you are wrong yourself.

To love and to do justice, to love and to do kindness, or steadfast love, you may have mercy. Are these things through? And here it is, to walk humbly with your God.

There's the horizontal, the way we deal with people, there's the vertical, the way we deal with God. Are we coming today saying, Lord, what can I do? What can I give?

[44 : 27] I've got nothing to give you. And he's saying, exactly. That's what Micah 6 is saying, what shall I bring? What can I offer? In the end he's saying, this is what he wants.

It's your heart. To love what he loves, and to spend your life walking with him. May God grant that, that we think of ourselves as people who are coming with nothing, but coming to receive everything, the blessing from his hand.

Let's turn to sing just now some words in Psalm 118. This is Scottish Psalter 118. Find this on page 398, 398.

We'll begin at verse 15, and we will continue singing until the table is prepared and the elders are ready to proceed.

So Psalm 118, verse 15, In dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health, the Lord's right hand doth ever valiantly.

[45 : 38] Let's sing from verse 15, Psalm 118, In dwellings of the righteous. Amen. Lord's right hand doth ever I am near.

Though I have loved the mighty Lord, and so with kiss yea by thee in hear I shall not die, but live and shout, the words of God discover.

The Lord of each house rises, but not to make it more.

O say, keep open unto me that is not righteousness.

Then will I enter into them, and I the Lord will bless.

[48 : 18] Amen. We do.

We call 1 Timothy 11 verse 23, and we pray, for as often as you eat this bread and break the camp, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Let's join together and pray at this point, shall we? We can seek God's blessing. Lord our God, as we take these moments in your providence and will, at this time and at this point in life, we once again have the privilege to be here at your table, and there's a very real sense that we don't really even begin to understand what we're doing.

But you have commanded your people to come. And Paul, your servant, was sharing with the Corinthians the reasons he had for doing what he did the way he did it.

And it's that very example that the church would always want to follow. The church in its best moments to walk in accordance with your word. And your church, being made up of individuals, it's our desire before you that we would keep your word and obey the way that you wish.

[50 : 36] And with these heavenly realities before us, in your word and in the sacrament, we pray for the Holy Spirit, His presence and His power, to take these visible and tangible elements of bread and wine, and to bless them to us all, blessing them to those looking on who will not partake.

But the very observation itself can be such a reminder of what is being said by not being at the table.

Lord our God, remember any wishing to be here. You might not be unable to through circumstances. You might not even be out today. You don't know. But Lord, you know each and every one.

And so as we come together, I write to your table, help us to remember you. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Just a few verses in Zechariah we read and think about. Familiar words, I'm sure, maybe the most familiar note of Zechariah to us.

[51 : 49] In chapter 13 verse 7, awake we read, awake O sword against my shepherd. Against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts.

Stroud the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. I will turn my hand against the little ones. And the whole land declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.

It's these words. And I will put this bird into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.

They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, they are my people, and they will say, the Lord is my God.

Clearly messianic, this prophecy isn't it? With Zechariah looking ahead. And our Lord, in the situation where he speaks to his disciples, all of you will fall away because of me tonight.

[52 : 53] And then he quotes these words. When it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. Again, the Father striking the Son, and the people of God scattering.

And then there is a description given of suffering that is going to come as a result of the cross. That is another area, we want to think more about that. But it is that last section that I think describes the church, and God's people at every age.

And God has his reasons for doing with us what he does. It is very possible that you have been coming today carrying a lot.

But no one else knows, the person beside you. People living maybe in the same house as you, in the same congregation. Ask how we are when we come in, and we have got to say the right thing.

Fear that you might be questioned if you say no, not feeling too good. But we need that shared trust. That fellowship of the saints.

[54 : 00] Where we are in the same category. Where pride and self-righteousness come in. There is the danger of thinking we are better than the next.

Or the other side, is where we think we are useless and everyone else is better. God's people are suffering people.

They are described here as being, God is saying, I will put this third. There is going to be a remnant of those who are being described earlier on in verses 6 and 7.

God is saying, I will put this third into the fire. Why? Well surely if God loves you, your life would work out and everything in it would be very plain safely.

Is that how it happens though? God is saying, I will put this third into the fire. And refine them as one refined silver.

[54 : 57] Burning up. Well that does need to be there in your life. In your personality. Can be painful. The youngest person here maybe knows. Not many as suggested.

Of course, but, we'll know what it is to feel your hand being burnt by a flame. Fire isn't comfortable even in a very, very small increase.

The picture of God putting his people into the fire to refine and test them. It's the end result that matters. But remembering today, the Lord's reason I think, for treating us if we were ever in that situation.

Feeling today life isn't complete. I'm not complete. Maybe your early Christian life started differently. And maybe like Peter we look at others and think, well they might do it.

Never me. But we learn don't we? He teaches us. And when we're brought through the fire. It's a bit like Job.

[56 : 00] No one's comparing himself with Job but with God's purpose. When he has tried me, I will come out like gold. He's not making any mistakes with your life.

Sometimes we might wonder his reasons. Look at the reason he gives here. Going through the fire, they will call upon my name.

And I will answer them in the fire. In the suffering. And for these times of blessing to be enjoyed and appreciated.

The fire is only things to come. Before a genuine and a real calling to him will take place. What's the Lord saying? I will answer them. I will say, they are my people.

And they will say, the Lord is my God. The way his providence can coalesce to great blessings. Even from his word and sacrament.

[56 : 59] But he can do things. To burn and consume everything else up in our lives. By that it's an internal thing. Some people it happens in different ways.

But you know the Lord is dealing with you. Maybe not what he's doing. Why he's doing it. When it will end. If it will end. But he's at work. And he wants you to talk to him.

And he said, I'll speak to you. And I'll say, you are my people. That's all that matters. Isn't it? There's a lot of things we haven't a clue about in our lives.

A lot of things about ourselves we haven't a clue about. Maybe thankfully. But the Lord knows this. And he wants you to remember. That he's bringing you through it.

And he's bringing you through it. To make you the best person that you're going to be. Ultimately like himself. But in the meantime.

[57 : 57] He said, you are my people. And for us to say, the Lord is my God. In happy soul. Sometimes our experience can polar and distort.

Our maybe awareness of God's blessings. And of God's intentions in our lives. So as the Lord was giving us.

The amazing example there. Paul was reminding us. That the Lord. The night in which he was betrayed. And he took bread. And he broke the bread. And he said, take, eat.

This is my body. Which is broken from here. In the same manner as all. He took the cup after supper. And he said, to drink all of it.

This cup is the New Testament. In my blood. This through as often as he drink it. In remembrance of me. Now, as the Lord ■■■■ over the door. This was my disgrace. The game you was mystical. It was a means of basketball player.

[58 : 54] And the one of the■■■he boards. This is the two principles that he was■■■■■■■■ birthday. Although his presence has rien. He wrote on alasse to teach a man. Then the penguins saw a man who had a step away. He drove under him to such a man who was perfectly ready. For someone who did the hungry.