

The Lord's Supper Appointed

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[0 : 00] Let's turn briefly tonight to the passage in Matthew that we read, Matthew 26 and at verse 26. Matthew 26 at verse 26.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. What I'd like to do tonight is just read the first paragraph of the chapter in the Confession of Faith that deals with the Lord's Supper.

I use that as a kind of commentary, not just on this passage, but on the Lord's Supper as a sacrament, which we find detailed in Scripture here and elsewhere, particularly in 1 Corinthians 11, as you well know.

The statement of the Confession is one that helps us very much, I've always found it helpful, to bring our minds really to focus on some of the essential elements, some of the essential things that the Lord's Supper is about, and some of the things that are essential for us to remember about the Lord's Supper, as we come in anticipation of it, as we do this week.

[1 : 34] Here is what it says. Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his church unto the end of the world.

That's the first thing that is mentioned. And it's interesting that it's called the sacrament of his body and blood, which is then said to be the Lord's Supper. Then he goes on to speak about the purpose for which this sacrament was instituted by Jesus.

For the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing of all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all the duties which they owe unto him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him and with each other, as members of his mystical body.

So in that description, you have two things about the Lord's Supper. Firstly, it's appointment, and then secondly, it's purpose. And the way the confession puts it helps us to see some of the things that are important in relation to both of these.

It's appointment and its purpose. And its appointment, of course, was by Jesus himself. That's plain from all the passages in the Bible that deals with it.

[3 : 02] And when Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11, looks back to the institution of the Lord's Supper, the appointment of it, it is exactly that, that he says, The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread and said.

So the tradition, really, that came from, the practice that came from the early church, from the apostolic church, and remember, that's the authoritative time at which these practices were set down by God for his church right through to the end of time.

The practice, as it was by the apostles and passed on by them, included the emphasis that Jesus himself had appointed it. And why is that important?

Well, it's important for one thing, because we have to keep sight of the fact that Jesus is alone, the head and king of his church.

And everything that comes by way of appointment, whether it's to office bearers in the church, or to ordinances of the church, that means in terms of the gospels preaching, or the administration of the sacraments, whether it's baptism or the Lord's Supper, they have been appointed specifically by the king of the church, by the head of the church himself.

[4 : 18] And down through the years, there have been so many difficulties for the church in standing for this great fact that cannot actually be given away to the state, or to any individual emperor, or whoever.

That was one of the difficulties that they faced in the days of the apostles themselves. That Caesar insisted that he was the king, and everyone, including the church, and including the church's Jesus, was really subject to him.

It is important that we actually see Jesus as the one who has set the ordinances of his church. Why do we have elders in the church?

Why is there such an office in the church as that of elder? Because it goes back to the way that Jesus himself, through the apostles, instituted or appointed such an office in his church.

It's not something that the church itself, left to its own devices, decided would be a good idea. It's not the first few congregations of the church deciding that this would be the best way that the church would actually be regulated, or ruled, or governed.

[5 : 32] It is by the ordinance, by the appointment of Christ himself. And when office bearers are appointed, the questions in the free church that we ask of elders and ministers, when they are appointed to office, or ordained to office, is that they acknowledge this, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as king and head of the church, has therein appointed of his bearers.

And he has the right to set the ordinances of the church. He has the right to set what is or is not what we call a sacrament. And therefore, the appointment of the Lord's Supper is something that Jesus, as the king and head of the church, in his right, in his exclusive right, has actually appointed.

Now that has very important connotations. That's very important in terms of, as you see, the way that this has been regarded in the history of the church.

Roman Catholicism, for example, has added another five sacraments to that of baptism and the Lord's Supper, for which there is no warrant in scripture, and which they largely acknowledge comes by the development of tradition in that branch of the church on earth, the visible church, the wider church.

That's one instance of a departure from what Christ himself has clearly instituted. You go to the other extreme and you find in the Salvation Army, for example, that there are no sacraments at all observed by them.

[7 : 18] They don't observe baptism. They don't observe the Lord's Supper. They give their own reasons for that. Some of them being just the fear of being bound by ritualism or just having an empty ritualism.

Of course, the setting up of the Salvation Army in the time it was set up had a lot of ritualism in the church of the time, but no more than you have today.

Anyway, the fear of ritualism or the fear of just having an outward form of a thing without any spiritual substance is not itself any valid reason why you should avoid having such a thing as baptism or the Lord's Supper if they are clearly appointed as they are by Christ.

So you see, the fact that the appointment is by Christ is really seriously important. It's not something that you just disregard or regard just in the passing.

It has its own importance and its relation to other important issues in the practice of the church in the world.

[8 : 26] That's the first thing about its appointment. It was by Jesus. Secondly, it was by Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed. That too is emphasized in the Bible as it is in the way the confession summarizes it.

The Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed is how the apostle in 1 Corinthians 11 again puts it. That was a significant thing for the apostles.

It was significant for the church to really remember that. That's why the likes of the Westminster Confession included these words in its statements about this ordinance.

Why is that important? Well, for two reasons at least that we can think of. There are others probably as well. It's important that it was in the night in which he was betrayed because it reminds us that this happened precisely in the timing of God at the time of the Passover when the Passover lamb would be sacrificed when the Lord Jesus took what was associated with and involved in the Passover and actually spoke about himself in relation to these things and their fulfillment.

It's quite clear that as you look at these passages in the Gospels in the three Gospels that recorded that the Lord was deliberately taking the things of the Passover the observance of the Passover the meaning of the Passover and transferring that to a new ordinance in the way that bread and a cup with wine were to be used in remembrance of his death.

[10 : 06] Just as the Passover was a remembrance for the people of Israel of what happened in Egypt on the night in which the Passover lamb was slain and that then followed by their exodus from bondage.

It was important it's important we remember that it was at that precise moment because it really dovetailed into what all of the Old Testament had anticipated and looked forward to with regard to the coming of the Son of God in the flesh to be the Passover lamb of his people.

Secondly it's important to remember that it mentions the night in which he was betrayed because it was a critical moment in the experience of the Lord himself and that too seems to have really been in the minds of those who framed the likes of the confession of faith because at such a critical moment it is then as John tells us at the beginning of his chapter 13 it is then that it states there that having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end or to the extremity.

The fact that Jesus was so taken up with his own circumstances so taken up with the immediacy of his death with the imminence of his death and with the kind of death that he needed to die and the reason for which he needed to die did not displace for a moment his thoughts about his people his love for them it was his love for them that if you like constrained him to carry through with the completion of this great work and nothing of what he himself would suffer or suffer even in anticipation of his death was going to displace their their salvation or their persons from his mind on the night in which he was betrayed that very same night the very same night with these circumstances with all that was in his mind with his own sufferings that's when that's when he instituted the Lord's supper that's when he took the bread that's when he took the cup and said this is the new covenant in my blood now when you come to the

Lord's table this Lord's day God willing you remember its appointment and you remember its appointment that it's important to you that the one you remember as your king as the king of the church as the head of the church that he instituted this that he instituted himself in his own authority and no other not any other person and that he did it on the night in which he was betrayed so that it would involve this transfer of the Passover into what is now the Lord's supper and that it would enable us to remember that it was indeed coming to the extremity of his sufferings that he appointed this feast for the benefit of his people that's the first thing about it in the confession statement it was appointed by Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed and it says to be observed in his church unto the end of the world and that comes to the purpose for which he instituted it firstly for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death there are five things in fact in the statement that help us to focus on the purpose for the Lord's supper and why he appointed it five things are to remember to seal to nourish to engage and to bond if we can run through these quickly we'll just see some of the points of importance in relation to them the purpose was to remember himself to remember him in his death this do he said in remembrance of me and there's an obvious connection there in the mind of the Lord and in what he's passing on to the disciples with the Passover the Passover you remember all the way through the Old Testament was the great remembrance occasion for the people of Israel

[14 : 48] God instituted that Passover for them once in the year at a specific point in their calendar so that they would remember what were they going to remember that they would remember they were slaves in Egypt that they would remember the Lord had come down to deliver them that they would remember the sacrifice by which they were delivered in the sacrificial lamb that they would remember their deliverance by this great God of grace it was every year for their remembrance remembrance now we're coming up soon to remembrance day as it's observed in our nation and as you know remembrance day is a day that's appointed to come about on the 11th of November each year to actually remember those who fell in conflict previously particularly in the two great wars and it's right that they are remembered that we remember these events that we remember what happened then that we remembered the cost of our liberties but then all the more do we have the same thing in principle applied to the Lord's supper the Lord actually knew that his church needed an ordinance or a ceremony of remembrance if we didn't have remembrance day in our nation it would very likely pass out of memory all too soon or at least become rather a faded memory

I know some people think that we make too much of it as a nation and some people have all of these ideas that it glorifies war and all that sort of stuff well it doesn't not if it's done for the right reason in the right way it's there to bring to memory things of importance that involved the giving of life and in regard to the Lord's Supper in a much more important way than the human life of course is important but the life of Jesus Christ that he gave in the sacrificing of himself is something that he would have us to remember and that's why he gave us the Lord's Supper as a remembrance as a memorial and in fact the elements that are used the bread and the wine very simple elements very ordinary elements but the way that they're used and the fact that these are the things which you use are themselves actually fitted very well and very suitable to bring things to your remembrance the way that it's actually done in taking the bread and eating the bread and taking the cup and drinking from the cup is itself very significant or suitable to bring something to your remembrance and the remembrance involves his body and his blood his sacrifice of himself through his death now that remembrance is something that you do in the spirit of love thankfulness because this is not just a mere act of memory it's not something that you just go back to in terms of a historical event that you say well

I remember it happened it's an act of remembrance it's an act of devotion in your remembrance it's an act in which your remembrance involves love and expressing your love thanks and expressing your thanks joy and expressing your joy solemnity and showing that solemnity confessing of sins and doing that confession as you remember remembering is all of that and some other things as well that you could think of that's the first thing in the purpose of it it's to remember the Lord's death of the Lord in his death the second thing that confession mentioned was it was the sealing of the sealing of all spiritual benefits thereof unto true believers the sealing all spiritual benefits thereof to true believers what does it mean that the

Lord's Supper is a seal or seals the benefits of Christ's death to true believers well it means if you think of a passport for example and if you're traveling to another country let's say you're traveling to America at passport control of course you have to show your passport and once everything's been examined and all the records that come up on your computers and all the rest of it by the customs man of all of these things are fine and there's no problems you'll stamp or she'll stamp your passport and the stamp will be the seal of the United States to verify the fact that your entrance has been approved you have the right given to you by that seal to enter that country for whatever length of time it is and the Lord's

Supper is a seal that confirms your right to the blessings that flow from Christ death it's a seal to through believers as the confession puts it of the benefits that flow from the death of Christ all the benefits that come from the death of Christ to his people when you come to the Lord's Supper and you take the Lord's Supper that itself is a seal to you it's a confirmation that the benefits are yours that you have a right to them that through faith you have access to them and they have come into your possession and it's actually including everything like forgiveness of sin acceptance with God things that we saw in the Lord's day for example this itself the Lord's Supper confirms your right to your right to speak of him as your savior to actually then possess in him these benefits that's what the confession says very rightly as a summary it is to seal these benefits to us as believers and of course that's important for your assurance as a

[21 : 45] Christian it's important for your assurance to not take the Lord's Supper when one should is just like having the document without a seal it has everything in it it has all the documentation in place it has all the dates it has the name everything is accurate but until that seal goes on it you don't have the assurance that you have the right and the Lord's Supper is something like that it doesn't confer salvation doesn't mean you're not saved if you don't take communion it doesn't mean that you cannot be saved until you take or unless you take communion but it is so important that it is a seal of the salvation that by faith you have in Christ it seals your right to that as a child of God that's the second point in the purpose for which he instituted for us it's to remember him it's to seal to true believers the benefits thereof that's of his death to them thirdly it's to nourish and again the confession speaks about that as nourishing their spiritual nourishment and growth in him their spiritual nourishment and growth in him in fact you go on to another part of the chapter of the confession paragraph 7 says that believers by faith as they see the elements outwardly really and spiritually feed upon

Christ crucified and the benefits of his death that's remarkable language and whatever people might fear in terms of ritualism and being bound by mere ritualism and of course there is such a thing it is so singularly important that we believe that Christ gave us the Lord's Supper so that our souls would be nourished so that by it he himself would use it as an ordinance through which your life and my life and the life of every true believer who comes would actually be fed and nourished spiritually and just as surely as ordinary food nourishes your body so there is in the Lord's Supper an element of nourishment that you have to see as important however much you may nourish your soul as you do on the word preached at other times on other things through which you receive spiritual benefits nevertheless that does not displace the fact that the

Lord's Supper in itself is a Supper it is a spiritual feast a means by which Christ nourishes his people see the way your faith is engaged or is active in the likes of the Lord's Supper it is just in a sense you could look at it as in a sense similar to what you have with your bodily muscles or your bodily limbs or whatever that as you exercise them and the more you exercise as though the more you keep them in good shape by that I mean in a level of fitness and actually in that level of fitness the more you exercise the more they're strengthened and it's the same with those things that you do through your soul such as believing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ and hoping towards his second coming and all that's involved in his second coming these things are things that you do with your soul you use the faculties of your soul you use your mind you use your will you use your emotions you use your understanding and in doing so as you exercise faith and hope and love through that so they're strengthened and to actually leave it aside as if it's just of secondary importance is really like saying that bodily exercise is really hardly important at all in order to keep a fit body or limbs or muscles or whatever it's part of our spiritual physiotherapy and the

Lord in his wisdom knew that we needed this ordinance where things are done differently to the preaching of the gospel which is verbally communicating the truth and you receiving it by listening to it and by using your mind to picture some of the things that are conveyed by the verbal preaching of the word but the sacrament of the Lord's supper is different in this sense it's the same truth of salvation and it's the same saviour but you're looking at it and doing it in a different way you're physically handling elements you're eating and you're drinking and therefore in a different mode you're actually engaging with Christ and that's why it's important in that sense too to regard it as nourishment as the purpose one of the purposes for which the Lord gave it and of course the other thing you have to say about that as we said earlier with another point was that the

Lord taking bread and wine a cup with wine it shows the wisdom of the Lord in regard to our nourishment how better could you actually express the need to be nourished and the actual nourishment itself than by eating and drinking what you do for your physical good is an illustration to you of what's needed for your spiritual growth and nourishment and as you take in the elements literally and physically so your soul is taking in the benefits of Christ's death spiritually for your nourishment so the purpose is to remember to seal to nourish and fourthly to engage to engage in the work that Jesus gives us to do this is what the confession puts us their further engagement notice it says their further engagement it's not the beginning of their engagement but it's their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him further engagement in other words it's to engage in serving

[29 : 00] Christ and you know the actual partaking of the supper itself we should see that as itself a pledge when we do that we are really effectively pledging ourselves to serve him to serve him in whatever ways he opens up for us and are proper for us to serve him in the actual partaking itself is a pledge you're actually saying effectively when you take the bread and when you take the cup I am promising I am pledging to be a servant of the Lord to serve him with my life to do everything for him that I can possibly do of course that sometimes might fill us with some fear and some people might stay away from the table from the Lord's supper because they're afraid of failing because they're afraid of lapsing because they might be afraid of doing something that would bring shame upon the church or his cause or on the Lord's name himself or on themselves and they may fear that they're not just good enough anyway not at the level at which they imagine they should be at in order to come to the

Lord's table well think of it this way how did Jesus seal his pledge to save his people by shedding his blood he sealed his pledge to save his people by going through with the work of the redemption until he had accomplished it all in his death so you see take from that how must we seal our pledge to serve him he's not asking us or commanding us to die for him he's already died for us in fulfilling his pledge to save us all he's commanding is that we remember it that we remember that he died for us is that too much when he's gone to the lengths of sealing his pledge in his own death we must seal our pledge we must actually come to engage for him in following his command do this in remembrance of me the

Lord will look after his people the Lord himself is the head of his sacrament and when he has given us the command to do this in remembrance of him we can't doubt his ability to enable us to fulfill it we can't doubt his ability to keep us however much we may fear our own weakness our own liabilities and all the other things we find wrong with us but let's pledge to be his people by the way he himself requires of us this do in remembrance of me purpose to remember to seal to nourish to engage our service and fifthly and finally the confession there says to bond to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him and with each other as members of his mystical body so it's to be a bond or to bond the

Lord Supper itself is a bonding of our relationship with God and also of our relationship to each other as believers so in other words communion to use the word communion which is what it is that's why we describe it as communion it's a communion that's two directional it's an upwards communion with the Lord himself and it's also a horizontal communion if you like as well as the vertical a horizontal communion with fellow believers not just at that moment at which we observe the Lord's Supper and the people that are actually gathered there it's actually the reformers insisted it's communion with all of God's people wherever they are and that's where the bonding is also important to be bonded to God is really the source of life or that through which we receive life from him and nobody would say that being bonded to

God is anything other than of vital importance but the Lord's Supper is itself an actual bonding additionally to what you have out with that it adds to the process if you like of bonding to the Lord it may be that many times we don't feel all that different coming away from the Lord's Supper still the Lord's Supper has been provided for us and it may be at some point after we've been to the Lord's Supper that the Lord blesses it to us in a way that strengthens that bond we have with himself but it's also a means of bonding together when we come to sit at the Lord's table it isn't just that we are conscious of doing this together as one people but others who are not at the table are also conscious of that fact that those people who come and confess that they are saved in

[35 : 08] Christ are in fact united and bonded in that salvation they are bonded together through the grace of Christ and the Lord's Supper for you is a means by which that bonding is given additional emphasis and strengthening so that we should think of the Lord's Supper in those terms as well as a further bonding together of our relationship and our fellowship and our communion as a people one with the other in the Lord so there's the Lord's Supper in that passage in the confession that helps us to understand something of first it's appointment it's appointment by Jesus it's appointment on the night of his betrayal secondly its purpose to remember him in his death to seal to us our right to the salvation that's in him through faith in him to nourish us spiritually feeding our souls upon him and that's indeed why he died fourthly to engage us to further serve him in this world and finally to bond together and to bond to

God in a way that increases that bond and that closeness and that fellowship that glorifies the Lord of the supper himself and may it be true that all who sit at the Lord's table with us on this coming Lord's day God willing will know the blessing of God so as to focus on the appointment by Christ of the supper and the purpose for which he appointed it so that from it we will indeed receive the blessings of his salvation let's pray Lord our gracious God we pray that you would receive our thanks that you would receive our pledges that you would receive all that we offer to you in worship and in our expression of commitment to you we thank you

Lord for all that makes this possible for us and especially as that is expressed to us in the word and sacrament we thank you for your remembrance of us as we seek to remember you so bless we pray all who intend to be at your table this coming Lord's day bless any whose thoughts are on doing so for the first time and encourage them Lord to do so give them we pray all that is required so that they will indeed realize that all the sufficiency is in the Lord himself and not in ourselves and graciously in all of these things forgive our many sins Lord we confess them to you and confess that we have not been many times what we should have been and as we should have been since our last time of communion forgive us we pray in your great mercy and use the sacrament itself we pray as a means for our further improvement in holiness and in commitment to your ways hear us we pray now for Jesus sake Amen