

# The Purpose of Communion

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hebrews chapter 3, Hebrews chapter 3, page 1204 in the ESV Bible. At the very beginning, therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession.

I don't need to tell you that next week is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And anyone who knows anything about the free church to whom we belong will tell you that communion is a very special event.

Many other churches, in fact, probably most other churches throughout the world will celebrate the Lord's death by dispensing communion much more frequently than we do, and many of them every Lord's Day.

It's part of their regular church life to remember the Lord's death in that particular way that he commanded his disciples. I'm not going to argue this evening about the benefits of or otherwise of regular or more regular communion.

[ 1 : 48 ] There is, of course, a danger that if you have communion every Sunday of losing sight of its significance. But not everyone, of course, agrees with that.

Some people will argue that the very opposite is the case. Others, like even the Puritan Stephen Charnock said that if communion is important, then all the more reason for doing it regularly rather than seldom.

Our tradition, of course, has meant that communion is not so regular, which has meant that for one reason or another it has been elevated. And in so doing, we have added our own trappings, our own elements to our tradition, in which there is, of course, a danger of overcomplicating things. And we can do that in a number of ways. I don't need to tell you of the pattern of services that there is, that there is every, at least when we have major communions, in our not quite sure of its right to talk about major or mini communions.

That's why we talk about in-house communions rather than talking about mini or major. You see, even there, you get hopelessly trapped in your own language. And every language has its own dangers.

[ 3 : 08 ] For example, at this time of year, we have a large number of preparatory services. You have other elements like communion tokens. You have a particular order of service, particularly on the Sunday morning, which means a great deal to some people.

I remember hearing of an elder on the mainland for whom the whole day was spoiled simply because the minister chose a slight deviation from the normal pattern or the normal order of service.

And he was so used to that order of service that for him the whole thing was spoiled just because it had been slightly altered.

The gospel was the same. The sacrament was the same. The occasion was the same. But the order for that particular gentleman was all important. It comes down to the precise psalms that we sing, the tune even that we sing, the psalm to, or whether the elder takes in the elements or not, whether there's a cloth on the table.

And, of course, the danger with all these things, I don't need to tell you any of this. You could tell me this. The danger is that the details, the elements themselves, the side issues, they overshadow the purpose of communion.

[ 4 : 25 ] And we lose sight of what we're there for, to remember the death of Jesus until he come in that particular way. And there was something very, very simple about the Lord's Supper in the New

Testament.

This do, he said, in remembrance of me, it was to be a solemn occasion. There was no question about it. And it was when that solemnity and that sense of occasion was lost in the Corinthians that things began to go wrong.

And yet it was a simple, straightforward occasion. I can't imagine the New Testament church, the early church, becoming concerned about the things that very often we are concerned about in our tradition.

So that's one way of complicating things. There's another way of complicating things as well. And that's perhaps what I'd like rather to focus on this evening. What I've talked about are external complications, but there are internal complications which affect the way we feel and the way we approach the Lord's, what we expect from the Lord's table and from the Lord's Supper.

Many people get hung up on what kind of feelings ought I to have at the table? Should I sense something special as I eat the bread or as I drink the wine?

[ 5 : 48 ] Should I feel an overwhelming awareness of the love of God in the act of eating or drinking? Some people feel a sense of doubt and a sense of utter despair.

They say, should I be here in the first place? I've had a bad week. I've ended up in arguments with people. I know that I've slipped up.

I've done things wrong. I've ended up saying things and doing things that I know I shouldn't have done. And perhaps I brought a bad witness to the cause. And perhaps the last place that I want to be right now is the Lord's table, where I feel that I'm different from everyone else because I've had such a struggle during the week.

Perhaps some people are concerned about whether they are as prepared as they ought to be. We emphasize preparation.

We have services to prepare us for the Lord's table. And many people will come and they'll say, well, if all this preparation is supposed to have taken place, I'm not sure if it's worked.

[ 6 : 56 ] I'm not sure if it's done the job that it should have done. I don't feel any more prepared than I did last Sunday to eat and to drink and to remember the Lord's death.

And of course, there are Christians from time to time who struggle with all kinds of doubts. Doubts about themselves. Doubts about the Bible. Doubts about where they are in relation to the Lord. Doubts about the Lord.

absenting yourself for these reasons, then the reasons just grow. And we have to remember that we have an enemy whose task and whose objective it is, is to destroy us, to destroy our witness, to destroy our confidence, to destroy our encouragement, and to destroy our love for the Savior.

And he will do everything that he can to undermine all that God is doing in you. and he will if the table is our place then he will tell us it's not our place and he will give us a dozen reasons why we shouldn't be there but every christian struggles you struggle i struggle from time to time in our christian and sometimes we struggle tremendously in our christian lives that's no reason for us not to be there in fact that's every reason for for us to be there when we're struggling where else are we going to find strength other than remembering the death of the lord jesus christ in which the love of god was demonstrated as never before at calvary for me it was for me that jesus died for me the poor struggling weak tempted christian that's often falling into these temptations that's the place i need to be because christ is my only hope where am i going to find that strength if i don't find it in the lord jesus christ and he has provided the lord's table not only as a means of remembering his death but as a means of grace you remember what a means of grace is it's a way of nourishing us as god's people in other words the lord's table is a means whereby god nourishes us and feeds us and strengthens us in a mysterious way i don't understand how that takes place but it does through the word through the service through the act of remembering jesus death and through meeting with the lord himself at his table it's a means of god bringing his strength into our souls and sending and many is a person by the way and i can say this from my own experience because i have struggled countless occasions in my christian life countless occasions and very often i've been tempted oh no communion is just around the corner this is the last time i want to sit i'm not going to sit at the table and you start making excuses to yourself and you say well i'm not going to go because there's something else i'll find something else to do and you end up not going but you but i do go i remember times when i did go and i've sat sat there and i think i at the beginning and by the end of it i realized this is where i should be and you go out strengthened in the lord because you've done what the lord has commanded you to do it this this do he says in remembrance of me the command

is the same whatever condition we are in you see there's a i wasn't going to talk about this but maybe this is for somebody you see there's an emphasis we make this emphasis on on trying to make yourself right don't you you kind of you kind of it's like the washing yourself mentality it's like when somebody goes comes to the door and sometimes people come to the door at the wrong time and you haven't shaved or you're in your old clothes or you've been working in the garage and somebody comes to the door and you feel terrible that's the way we feel sometimes at the lord's table and we feel that the way to get over that is to go up to the bathroom and spiritually wash our face and to get ourselves ready for the lord what can we do to get ourselves ready for the lord we can't do anything to make ourselves better we discovered that when we came to faith in jesus in the first place that we were a wretch just like john newton says that saved a wretch like me what makes us what makes us think that now now that we are christians that we can somehow make ourselves clean for sitting at the lord's table you can't it's only christ that can continue to sanctify you and wash you and when the bible says the blood of jesus christ cleanses us from all sin that's a continuous it means that it

[ 12 : 11 ] continues to cleanse you from all sin it's the same with with prayer sometimes you say to yourself i can't pray i'm in the wrong frame of mind well i know what you mean by that maybe things have been going wrong you're in a bad mood you've had an argument and you feel i can't pray and what you what you're saying is well i'll have to go and do something about myself in order to pray what can you do to make yourself right with god other than what christ has already done he's done it all it's all been done and you need to come back to that truth time and time again there isn't a single day i hope when i don't remember that christ has done it all and my hope is only and exclusively in jesus christ there's nowhere else i can go and certainly not to myself i can do nothing to wash myself or shave in order to meet with the lord it's him that does it for me and it's by me coming to him that i accept what he you know if you are a believer today tonight then you have everything nothing has been withheld from you and you cannot do anything by your struggling or by your weakness or by your failure you cannot do anything to change the love of god for you nothing can separate us from the love of god in jesus christ not anything that you've done or anything that you can do or any condition or or or or struggle that you have in your life now i wasn't going to say that i i hope that by providence that that perhaps the lord is is speaking to someone this evening there are people who say well i'm not as full of the joy of the lord as i once was when i came to christ at first that's not that that is not a barrier for you coming to the lord's table neither is any event that has taken place in your life if you are in christ then you come to his table there are some people who talk about their understanding of jesus perhaps you have never come to the lord's table you're a christian you believe in the lord you're following jesus but you feel you haven't progressed or matured you don't have enough understanding of the lord and what he's done none of us have enough understanding none of us will ever fathom the depths of what jesus has done for us on the cross you still need to be there because jesus has said this do do this in remembrance of me how much understanding do you need to remember what jesus did for you very little very little so these are that's what i mean by our the internal the internal complexities that we generate within ourselves as well as the external ones which the church can sometimes be guilty of we we generate ourselves our internal well you know to combat all of these complexities sometimes the simplest parts of the bible of where we need to go the very ones that reorient our thoughts to where they should be like this one look at what he says i took a little bit longer than i hope to get to this holy brothers you who share in a heavenly calling consider jesus and that's it really isn't it consider jesus because the lord's supper is not about ourselves and our conditions and our circumstances important as they are the lord's supper is about jesus and the way we come to the lord's supper properly is to come considering thinking about

focusing on jesus it's about him who he was what he came to do what he did when he laid down his life on the cross and what he did when he rose again triumphant over the grave and ascended to the right hand of the father if we are considering jesus as we should be then we are in the right frame of mind to sit at the lord's table and i can't think of two more suitable words in the bible to focus upon to think about with you this evening as we approach the lord's table than just the simple command in these verses consider jesus if it means that if we turn our thoughts to him then we will be prepared to sit at the table and if we're considering him then we will take the elements in the right frame of mind but let's take a step let's just not think about these two words let's think about them in the context in which they are given and particularly two things i'd like us to think about in

this verse that we find of this where first of all there are two descriptions of the christian that i hope will help us as we make our as we think about the lord's supper next week two descriptions of the lord's people but then there are also two descriptions of jesus himself so let's think about the verse in these two senses first of all in the two descriptions of the christian and then the two descriptions of jesus first of all the apostle says that we are holy brothers holy brothers let's be inclusive holy brothers and sisters nothing wrong with that holy brothers we are a holy family which means that we are separate god's people were always separate not in any gratuitous discriminatory sense the way that people object to separatism nowadays this is god's doing when god separated abraham when he called abraham and isaac and jacob and told them that from now on their seed after them was going to belong to him it was for his own reasons in order for him to enter into a covenant relationship with them if for with the purpose of jesus coming into the world and all nations in the world being blessed that's what it meant to be holy and they were to be holy because they were to reflect in their lifestyle and in their relationship to him they were to reflect his holiness that's why he said be holy because i am holy a christian in the new testament is someone who reflects jesus that's the word christian someone who is who belongs to jesus who is tied and united to jesus we are identified by our relationship to jesus christ and if you're ashamed of that then there is something wrong with your thinking if you're ashamed to be different from the world around you and the way in which the world lives around you and if you constantly try to live the same way as everyone else because you don't want to rock the boat and because you want to be the life and soul of the party and because you don't want to lose your friends then there is something wrong i'm not saying you should alienate everybody of course not and but what i am saying that if the more you live as jesus then the more of an outsider you're going to be that's why when peter wrote to the disciples

he told them he addressed them as those who were scattered who were strangers in the world that didn't mean that they were geographically located in mongolia or the north pole it meant that as far as the outside world was concerned and the way that they regarded you you were odd you were different you did different things you lived differently you live by a different set of standards all together and your your guiding principle was different and that's the way that's always been for a christian sometimes in a world that recognizes christians that's okay and it's relatively easy to do that in a world and our our society is increasingly getting that way to be a christian is going to be more more and more and more strange and yet the challenge that god puts before us tonight is are you prepared to stand alone for me holy brother we're not only holy but we're brothers there's a particular bond and relationship that exists within god's people in which they have been brought together in their love for the lord jesus christ we are family and it seems to me that this it just falls on deaf ears i don't know how many times that i've heard this great central truth the one the commandment that jesus gave his disciples was that you love one another as i have loved you and it seems to be the most difficult command to fulfill and you cannot approach the lord's table without doing it collectively we do so collectively you don't do it on your own you never take communion in your house by yourself you always take communion as part of the church and every time we meet together in order to share the cup and share the plate it's a fresh reminder of a relationship to one another whether we get on well or whether we don't whether we agree with one or whether we don't you take a collection of any collection of god's people even half a dozen of them and within a few minutes they'll disagree on something because we're all different we're all diverse the challenge is that because of our love for the lord jesus christ are we are we willing happily willing to love one another as god has loved us holy brothers that's what we are let's move on to the second description the second description is who share in a heavenly calling we share in a heavenly calling this word share has appeared before in verse in verse 14 it's a it's a it's a word that comes up time and time again in the new testament it makes the difference between someone who simply is partaking something and something who is part of it so let me give you an example a few years ago number of lots of years ago i received an envelope through the door i'd taken out this insurance policy with norwich union as they were then it was a car insurance policy and i got this envelope through the door and they said you are now a shareholder in norwich union and there was a windfall it wasn't much it was just a small amount of money but you felt i'll tell you the way i felt i felt this is this is a privilege i am no longer a customer i am no longer a client i am a shareholder i am part small part of norwich union because every time they have an agm i get a letter inviting me to the agm of norwich union that has now become aviva which is one of the biggest insurance companies in the country and i get a letter every time that they have an agm i've

never gone but i still like to get the letter because i'm part of this massive great movement and i can tell you it's the same how much more is it for a christian we are not clients of god you know the new word nowadays is client there's a client everybody's a client nowadays even prisoners i think are clients nowadays but it's just another word isn't it when god thinks of us he doesn't think of us as clients he thinks of us as sons and daughters precious to him people who have been called by himself out of darkness and purchased by his own precious blood on the cross and brought in and adopted into his family so that when he thinks of us he thinks of us with an extraordinary love that we haven't even begun to comprehend that's why paul said to the ephesians he says i want you to set your heart i want the my here's my prayer he said i want you to know how high and wide and deep and broad the love of god is for you that was their lifelong ambition to understand to comprehend of course we will never do that the love of god he has brought us into his kingdom we share in the heavenly calling now why is this important because it reminds us of who we are in relation to god it relates and it reminds us of god's perspective of who we are the devil will come to us and tell us you are nothing you aren't always blowing it you're always making a mess of everything that you set out to do for the lord you're always tripping up and falling and failing and sinning and god says you are my people you are my son you are my daughter you share in my kingdom and i love you with an unchanging love i've set you apart to be my own to feed you and nourish you and teach you and lead you and guide you and in the end i will raise you up at the last day and take you forever to be with myself that's who you are and that's how we come to the lord's table with that in mind we have to have a correct perspective of ourselves the way god thinks of us let's look now then at the description of jesus the two descriptions of jesus in this verse he's called the apostle and he's called the high priest of our confession two titles of jesus the apostle first of all now we know or we think we know what an apostle is some people speak about modern day apostles i don't agree i respectfully disagree that there are modern day apostles why not why is it why do i not agree with well because an apostle in the bible was someone who was sent that is the definition of the word apostle the twelve apostles they were sent by jesus he said in matthew 28 go into all the world these were the ones who witnessed his life his miracles his teaching his death his resurrection and they were the ones who on that foundation were sent into the world to make disciples of all nations therefore they were apostles in that they were sent even the apostle paul was sent by the risen jesus when he met him on the road to damascus but here is that same word and it's used in relation to jesus so if you keep in mind that the word apostle means someone who was sent you're asking yourself in what way was jesus sent and who sent him well anyone who knows the gospel of john will know instantly where that comes from it comes from the father in heaven who sent his son into the world and the son came in his willingness and in his love for a lost world having been sent countless times i couldn't list the number of references that are in the gospel of john there it was a constant recurring theme in the gospel of god when when jesus would jesus would refer to the one who sent me i am the one from the father if he who have seen me has seen the father and so on and so forth constantly regularly jesus is referring to himself as the one who came from the father so uppermost in jesus mind was the idea of fulfilling the work that the father had given him to do and uppermost was his passion for obedience now here is where we find it a bit difficult to understand aren't we because in our world the idea of obedience is something that we resent i suppose a product of sinfulness authority has gone out the window in our hearts it's turned on its head and so instead of being something that is gloried in when we talk about submission negative thoughts come into our minds don't they it's something servile it's something to be despised and if you're in a person if you're in a position where you have to obey something you're going to be looking for ways in which you can cut corners and ways you can get round that task of obedience there's the idea of servanthood but when it comes to God servanthood is part of the

[ 31 : 09 ] Godhead that's the relationship that they have with one another father son and holy spirit there is nothing to be despised there is everything to be gloried and that's why Jesus said we've just sung it in psalm 40 lo it is written in the volume of the book I come this is Jesus speaking we've just been singing albeit in Gaelic we've been singing the words of Jesus as the father sent him into this world on the mission to lay down his life with all the pain and the suffering that that was going to involve in order to redeem people like ourselves into and draw them into his loves to become sharers with himself in his kingdom and Jesus response is I come and he does so with absolute perfect delight when the father says something Jesus instead of despising and resenting and reluctantly doing the way we would do it Jesus instantly says to do your will

I take delight see in order to understand the gospel you have to understand God and God thinks differently to the way we think you cannot measure God on our terms you cannot say because I think this way therefore I expect God to think this way what we think of as servile and something that is despised God glories in and so when Jesus was sent into the world and here was the mission to redeem people to redeem people you and I are Christians tonight because it was the idea of the father in heaven you and I are Christians tonight if we belong to him because God initiated our salvation because he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life the last description of Jesus is the high priest the second description we've seen how Jesus came as he was sent by the father in love and in perfect obedience the second description was that he is a high priest

I said before that if you want to understand the gospel you have to think differently if you want to understand the gospel also you have to think old testament I'm not saying you can't be a Christian if you don't understand the old testament but I am saying is if you're going to know what the gospel is and if you're going to improve your knowledge and really grasp the gospel you absolutely have to go back into the old testament because the new testament is full of old testament terms like high priest if you want to know the work of Jesus you have to go back into the old testament and you have to struggle as it is there may be someone here tonight who's never even heard the term in our world we're increasingly meeting people who haven't a clue haven't the faintest idea of what to you and I or to many of us here is stuff that we've been brought up with Jesus is the high priest and I would suggest that if the new testament this chapter calls him a great high priest it's for a reason and it's for an important reason now what was that just in that one minute one minute to explain what a task is that one minute to try and explain the high priest

I'm never going to do it but the high priest in the old testament was the person who stood between you and God when it came to your relationship to God he was the one person that you needed in the old testament that would make sacrifice for your sin and through that sacrifice God promised to forgive through the shedding of blood God promised to forgive you through in and through the high priest he was an ordinary man he was chosen by God he was appointed by God to stand between you and God and to make atonement by sacrifice he was the one person that you need you see tonight perhaps somebody is thinking I don't I'm the high priest the whole idea of a high priest just evokes all kinds of confusing thoughts and I'll tell you why because you don't need them the moment you need someone then all of a sudden that someone becomes the person you need let me illustrate that a number of weeks ago

I was driving from Stirling and I drove decided to drive through Glencoe and up through Fort William and all the rest of it my car had just been serviced and about half an hour into the journey you know how you've been driving a car for the last three or four years and you know the sound of the engine and you know when things are right and when something was wrong I wasn't quite sure what it was there was something wrong and the more the more I went the worse it became and it began to get at first I thought I was imagining things and then it got worse and worse and worse I began to then feel it there was a shudder in the wheels I had to slow down and then I began to get worried because it was getting worse and worse and worse and Fort William couldn't have come soon enough thankfully the thing got so bad just after I crossed into Fort William I had to stop a big car park on the left hand side of the road just as you come into Fort

[ 36 : 56 ] William I stopped the car it was nine o'clock at night there was no buses I didn't know what to do I didn't have a clue where to look I knew it was somewhere on the passenger side of it there was something perhaps to do with the wheel I had no idea whether it was slight or major or whatever and I phoned the AA I can tell you do you want to know how I felt when I saw that pickup turning the corner I felt a sense of relief that I haven't often felt in my life I felt this sigh normally an AA truck means nothing to me I don't give it a second look second glance on the road the sign means nothing to me I get letters through the post offering me AA this and AA that I throw them in the bin

I'll tell you this when I needed the AA he was the most important guy at that moment in my whole life because on him depended whether I would get home or not God and that's what the high priest is there are many of you tonight and you just switch off as soon as you read high priest you think nah I'll think about it some other time but I'll tell you when you're asking yourself how can I be right with God that's what you need that's the only person that you need is a high priest because he was the one who stood between you and God and Jesus tonight is our high priest he's the one who

stands between you and God his death was the payment for our sin when Jesus died on the cross he died as our representative we died in him he took our guilt upon himself and offered himself to God and God the father accepted his death as the sacrifice of for our sin given to him and and and sacrificed by our great high priest and I can tell you this the more you know about Jesus as our high priest the more you know about the love of God in Jesus Christ the more it's illustrated and it's brought to be plain and clear and profound and deep and tonight we come to him as our high priest next week God willing we will remember him as our great high priest and what he did for us by trusting in what he did by accepting his death that's what a Christian is a Christian is someone who has accepted Jesus death as the payment for my sin as my great high priest the one who has stood between me and God and who has paid for my sins with his life and if you believe in Jesus tonight if you trust in him if you belong to him by faith if you have come to him and put your hope in him then you come and be with us next week remembering his death as he has commanded us to do we are holy brothers we share in a heavenly calling and we are to consider focus our thoughts upon Jesus and what he came into the world and what he accomplished on the cross and his continuing undying love for his own people sinners like you and I who depend upon him and on him alone let's pray father in heaven we give thanks now once again for the gospel and for what it means to each one of us and we ask lord that you will bring it to us with great power even if it's in language that we don't readily or immediately understand even if it's in concepts and ideas that we've never come across ever before we pray that by the power of the holy spirit that we will be brought to persist in our understanding and that the light will shine and that your spirit will bring us to that place where we love Jesus as he has first loved us in his name amen going to sing in psalm 160