The Lord’s Supper
Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Today is a special day in the life of the church. Today, we are going to enjoy a meal together. Right after the worship service, we will gather together in the fellowship hall and enjoy a good meal with good friends. I am looking forward to it, as I am sure you are. As Baptists, we love a good meal. Maybe that’s not just true for Baptists. Actually, today is a special day in the life of this church because we are going to have two meals, so I guess that means it is a really special day. The other meal is not often considered a meal, although it could be. In fact, the early church may have celebrated this as a meal. This meal is referred to as many things. In some traditions, the church refers to it as Communion. In others, the church refers to it as the Eucharist. And then many refer to it as the Lord’s Supper. In First Corinthians, Paul refers to this meal as the Lord’s Supper, so that is what I will be calling it.

There are two ordinances of the church that Baptists typically observe. We call them “ordinances” because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ordained them for the church, God’s holy people, to practice. Baptists traditionally view these ordinances as acts of worship that symbolize spiritual truths. Therefore, we do them not just because we are told to do them, which would be enough, but to teach and remind ourselves of what God has revealed to us. The first ordinance is Baptism, which is practiced by someone who has already accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior – who has trusted in Him for salvation. This ordinance is typically observed once in a believer’s life, to signify the beginning of a new life in Christ. It symbolically represents the burying of the believer in water, like Jesus being buried in the tomb, and then raising him or her up to new life in Christ. The second ordinance is the Lord’s Supper. Unlike Baptism, the Lord’s Supper is an event in the church that the whole congregation repeats as often as the church chooses. Some churches observe it every time they meet, while others observe it monthly or quarterly. However often it is observed, the Lord’s Supper is a special time of worship in the life of the church, but like Baptism, it has been one of those things often misunderstood, and sometimes misused.

In the passage for this sermon, the apostle Paul addressed the issue of observing the Lord’s Supper. If you recall, Paul wrote the letter of First Corinthians to the church in Corinth, a city that had a reputation for immorality, religious diversity, and corruption. The church Paul planted there struggled under these influences and began to divide over various issues. We have seen so far in the letter where Paul has addressed issues such as who the church is and what it should be doing, about following Jesus and not various leaders in the church, about working out problems within the congregation, and about glorifying God in all that we do. In chapter eleven, Paul takes up the issue of observing the Lord’s Supper. More than likely, the Corinthian church observed the Lord’s Supper as a meal. There may be nothing wrong with that. The issue Paul seems to address is not that it was a meal, but that some members of the church were apparently coming to church to eat just a meal – to fill their stomachs and get drunk from the wine. The Lord’s Supper had lost its true meaning on these believers.
In fact, Paul accuses the Corinthians of not coming to observe the Lord’s Supper at all. In verse 20, he states, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat.” Because of their selfishness, the Corinthians were not rightly representing the true meaning of this important act of worship – and it is worship, or it should be. The meal the Corinthians were observing was some type of meal without spiritual significance. Therefore, I would like to offer five meanings for the Lord’s Supper that will hopefully help us understand its significance. I will briefly mention the first three, and then spend a little more time to explain the last two meanings.

Five Meanings of the Lord’s Supper

**Fellowship Meal** – Paul wrote in this passage, “when you come together as a church,” as a group of people called out of the world into fellowship with Jesus Christ, and “as often as you (the church) eat the bread and drink the cup.” Paul was addressing the Corinthian congregation, referring to when they come together to worship together. The church observes the Lord’s Supper together, in fellowship with one another. It is not meant to be observed individually. We observe it together, as the family of God, as His people. That was part of the problem Paul was addressing to the Corinthian church. Some people in the congregation were left out and not able to participate in the meal. Paul reminded the church that they ought to observe it together, with one another. **It is a Fellowship Meal!**

**Thanksgiving Meal** – On the night Jesus was betrayed, the night He instituted the Lord’s Supper, He first gave thanks. This is where we get the word Eucharist, which means “thanksgiving”. Jesus was about to be betrayed by one of His disciples. He was about to be put on trial and to be crucified for the sins of mankind. Yet, He was thankful. Therefore, like Jesus did, when we come to observe the Lord’s Supper, we ought to celebrate it with a spirit of thankfulness. Think about all the blessings and reasons for which we ought to give thanks to God – life, freedom from sin, salvation by grace, forgiveness of sin, and many others. There are so many reasons for us to be thankful. **It is a Thanksgiving Meal!**

**Proclamation Meal** – Paul also told us, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of Jesus’ death and sacrifice. Each time we observe the Lord’s Supper, we announce the good news of Jesus Christ who was crucified for the forgiveness of our sin. Paul told us that we are to proclaim our Lord’s death until He returns; therefore, until King Jesus comes to get His church, we are to proclaim His sacrifice through this meal. **It is a Proclamation Meal!**

So, the Lord’s Supper is a Fellowship Meal, it is a Thanksgiving Meal, and it is a Proclamation Meal. I will spend a little more time on the next two meanings.

**A Memorial Meal – Do This in Remembrance of Me**

Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as a way to remind the disciples of what He was about to do for them. The passage tells us that we should observe it in order to remember what Jesus has done for us. God wants us to remember Him and His wondrous works of grace. As humans, we have a tendency to forget these things, particularly when trouble comes our
way. You probably know what this is like. When things are going well, we remember the good things, but when things are not going well, we tend to forget them. The Lord’s Supper is a reminder that God is good and has bestowed upon us His grace and favor through the sacrificial death of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

There are two elements of the Lord’s Supper that we partake, which serve to remind us of Jesus and His sacrificial death. They are the bread and the wine (or juice). The Bread represents the body of Christ that was given for us. Sometimes, we think of only the crucifixion, the cross, which was the instrument the Roman authorities used to execute criminals. However, Jesus’ body was broken before the crucifixion through the pain and suffering He experienced during his “scourging”. Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years before Jesus was born about the “Suffering Servant,” that “by His stripes we are healed.”

There is another aspect of the bread I would like to mention. Consider for a moment who broke the bread the night Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. It wasn’t Peter. It wasn’t Judas (the betrayer), and it wasn’t a Roman soldier. It was Jesus. Jesus broke the bread and then distributed it to the disciples. I think this reminds us that Jesus willingly allowed His suffering and death! Jesus willingly gave His own life as a sacrifice for us. We are healed and set free from sin by the broken body of Christ that He willingly gave for us.

The Wine (or Juice) represents Jesus’ blood that was shed for us. In fact, we are told the cup represents God’s “new covenant” with mankind. Paul wrote in verse 25 of the passage:

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

It is through this new covenant, through the blood of Christ, that we have the forgiveness of sins. We no longer have a priest who goes into a temple annually to make an animal sacrifice on our behalf. We have a High Priest who once for all sacrificed Himself, and by His own body and His own blood we can be reconciled to God and forgiven of our sins. That is God’s promise to us. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this new covenant in which God’s people would know God and would be forgiven:

Jeremiah 31:31, 34 (ESV) 31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

The blood of Jesus is the basis of this new covenant, the basis of our forgiveness. The foundation of the new covenant is the shedding of the blood of God’s own Son in our place for the forgiveness of our sins. When we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord’s Supper we remember the promise of God and the forgiveness of our sins by the blood of God’s own Son. The Lord’s Supper is a Memorial Meal!
A Self-Examination Meal – *Examine Yourself as Worthy*

Paul introduced the Lord’s Supper in chapter eleven in his rebuke of the Corinthian church’s selfish and unloving behavior at church meals. Remember, some were coming to church with the attitude of serving themselves and satisfying their own selfish desires. The main issue Paul was addressing in this passage was the selfish behavior of Christians when they come together to observe the Lord’s Supper. What can we learn from this? We can first understand it in the context of our own need for Christ. We are all sinners separated from a holy God, in need of His grace and His forgiveness! This ought to remind us is that repentance is necessary for everyone. For the unbeliever, the one who has not trusted in Jesus, repentance is turning from sin, realizing one’s own “lostness” without God, and turning to the one Person who can provide forgiveness – Jesus Christ, God’s only Son.

But repentance does not stop when a person becomes a believer. How many people have stopped sinning once they became a Christian? I haven’t met any Christians, including myself, who do not need to repent. We ought to repent as often as we are aware of our sins, and then repent of those sins of which we are not aware. The Lord’s Supper is a time for the church to remember what God has done for us and to repent of what we have done, or not done. Paul wrote the following:

1 Corinthians 11:27–28 27 Whoever …eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an *unworthy manner* will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Maybe you are asking yourself, what does eating and drinking “in an unworthy manner” mean? I suggest that it probably means several things: 1) not appreciating what the bread and cup signify – that Christ loved the church and died for her; 2) not feeling remorse for those attitudes and actions that are inconsistent with the love of Christ; 3) not repenting of those attitudes and actions; and 4) failing to trust in Jesus for forgiveness of those sins.

Unworthy does not mean we have to be perfect to partake of the Lord’s Supper. If that were so, none of us should participate in the Lord’s Supper. But I think it does mean we should come to the Lord’s Supper with the right attitude. When we come to the Lord’s Supper, we ought to examine ourselves, meaning to test ourselves, to determine the genuineness of our faith. Some questions we can ask ourselves:

- Have I turned away from God?
- Is there any area in my life where I have not been faithful to Him?
- Is there any area in my life for which I have not totally surrendered to Jesus?
- Is there any area in my life for which I know I need to repent and ask forgiveness?
- Have I, like some of the Corinthian believers, selfishly placed myself before others?

These are just some things to think about as we prepare ourselves for the Lord’s Supper. There may be others. The point is this: the Lord’s Supper is a time we should search
ourselves and ask for God’s forgiveness for those things which offend Him and those things which hurt others. **The Lord’s Supper is a Self-Examination Meal!**

**Conclusion**

As Christians, we are instructed to remember the great gift of salvation provided by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We do this together by observing the Lord’s Supper. By partaking the bread and juice, we remember the body of Christ given for us and the blood of Christ shed for our forgiveness. As followers of Jesus Christ, we should take this time to examine our lives, to put ourselves on trial, in order to prepare ourselves and ask for God's forgiveness. Also, as we observe the Lord’s Supper, we are proclaiming God’s love for us through the sacrifice His Son Jesus Christ. For those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who have not placed their trust in Him, salvation is available to anyone who calls upon Jesus Christ, who turns from a life of sin, turns to the Savior of mankind. This is good news, thanks be to God. Amen!