

## **Remember** **I Corinthians 11:17-34**

In the animated Disney movie, *Lion King*, Pride Rock is the scene where Mufasa introduces to his waiting kingdom of animals the birth of his firstborn son, Simba who will one day rule the land. With an heir to the throne Scar the evil brother of Mufasa begins to scheme how he might usurp the throne and take over Pride Rock and his brother's kingdom. In a staged stampede of Wildebeests initiated by Scar, Mufasa loses his life attempting to save Simba. What Simba doesn't know is that it was Scar who sent Mufasa to his death. Scar blames Simba and offers the only hope of survival Simba has and encourages him to run away and never return.

Exhausted from his ordeal, Simba collapses in a heap in the wasteland where he is found by two unsuspecting characters in Timon the Meerkat and Pumbaa the warthog. They nurse him back to health and teach him their lifelong motto – *hakuna matata*, which means “no worries.” Following their example Simba grows up to live a very carefree life. Years later he is confronted with his past. In the night winds of the open plain his father speaks to him a simple yet challenging word – **REMEMBER**. Simba takes on the challenge accepting his call, returns to Pride Rock, defeats his uncle and establishes a peaceful kingdom in the circle of life.

Our calendars are filled with things we are asked to remember. Some are national remembrances. Others are personal. They range from remembering the founding of our nation as we celebrate Independence Day on July 4; or a call to keep in mind the first pilgrims who settled the shores of this great land as we commemorate Thanksgiving. It seems like a month ago we started getting circulars about Christmas. This week we will remember Veteran's Day and of course in May we remember again our service men and women on Memorial Day. Back in the mid '80's we added Martin

Luther King Day as a way to remember the distinguished leader who tirelessly pursued civil rights and many more.

Then there are those more personal days we remember as individuals and families. They range from birthdays to anniversaries to Sweetest Day to Mother's and Father's and Grandparent's Day and any number of other hallmark holidays. Now Everett, you just celebrated your birthday. Has Arlie ever forgotten it? Or should I ask have you ever let her forget it. And you've been married, is it 65 years? Dare I ask if Everett ever failed to remember an anniversary?

Remembering can be a time of celebration or it can be a time of mourning, a time of joy or a time of sadness. If we were to specifically consider some of the major holidays where we get a day off work or school and if we were to take a random poll of people as to what they do on that particular day what percentage of people would actually state that they take time to remember the reason that day is celebrated? People might enjoy a day off work or school. They may plan an outing or gathering with other friends or family and yet never once pause to remember the reason they have that day off in the first place, never once give a second thought about the meaning or significance of the day.

For devotions I have been reading Joshua in my journey through the Old Testament. The Lord told Joshua to get the people ready to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Instructions were given for the Priests carrying the Ark to lead the way and when they got half way they were to stop and then all the people would cross over. When they were safely on the other shore Joshua commanded the leader from each of the 12 tribes to return to the middle of the river where the Ark was and pick up a rock and bring it back to shore. They did this in the sight of all Israel. Joshua arranged them in a pile as a continual reminder to the people of the Lord's provision and protection. If they ever were a little

fearful about difficult circumstances and wondered about whether God would protect and provide, they could return to that pile of rocks to help them remember what God had done in those years of wandering and the fulfillment of His promise to bring them to the Promised Land. If their children and their children's children should ask what that pile of rocks meant it was a way to teach them to remember that God is faithful, He always keeps His word, He never goes back on a promise.

**Lamentations 3:22-23** reminds us that God's compassions never fail, they are new every morning because His faithfulness is great. Those rocks were a way for them to remember.

There is another important event in history that we are to remember regularly. Turn **to I Corinthians 11:17-34** in your Bibles with me. This passage is a call to remember, to remember who Jesus is and what He has done for us through communion.

Perhaps your family has passed on some traditions that now generations later have little meaning to you. Or maybe it still has significance but over time the meaning has been lost in the tradition as it has been passed along the generational lines. What Paul teaches here is not an insignificant tradition. It isn't supposed to be just some ritual that we observe because we were told to keep it. On the first Sunday of each month we commemorate we celebrate together around the Lord's Table.

Every time we come to this table we are called to remember the significance of what Christ did as it is represented in the bread and in the cup. The Lord's Supper offers us an opportunity to think about the purpose of the Lord's coming to earth in the first place; to think about His selfless, sacrificial death on the cross as He died in our place taking our sin on Himself. It's an opportunity to remember that He shed His blood so that we could have eternal life. It's an opportunity to remember that He didn't remain in the grave. It's an opportunity to

remember that He is coming back. It's a time to remember that we are to be ready for that return.

Paul's ministry was about sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ so that people would be saved and then helping them grow in their faith. When and where necessary his words were a sharp scalpel cutting to the heart of an issue that needed swift action so that spiritual disease would not set in. Paul had more than one rebuke for this church in this letter. They were divisive. They tolerated incest. They misused and misunderstood spiritual gifts. They were self-seeking rather than exhibiting Christ like love for others. In this passage Paul is going to address his concern for the way they observed communion. In this month of Thanksgiving, this passage should be a reminder to give thanks for what Jesus did.

Notice first his word of condemnation about their observance of communion.

## **I. A CONDEMNATION ABOUT THEIR COMMUNION – v. 17-22**

Bear in mind that communion is anchored in union. The Greek word is koinonia and speaks broadly of fellowship and a spirit of unity that should exist within that gathering. Paul began by noting that he has nothing good to say about the issue he will now address. If they were going to continue to be divisive around the Lord's Supper it would be better for them not to even have communion. Their actions mocked the very reason or purpose they were to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Communion is a reminder to us that in Christ we are part of one body and with their divisive spirit ruling the day, there was anything but unity. That Paul addressed their disunity when they gathered for communion underscores that this problem had been going on for quite some time without any hope of ending unless it was dealt with.

Here's the problem as Paul saw it. Remember that the church was made up of all classes of people.

Some scholars estimate that maybe 50% of the people in Paul's day were slaves. So the church was made up of those who were free and those who were slaves. Some were wealthy and some were poor. An event, an ordinance that was to bring them together as one body was instead causing an even greater rift between them. Factions and divisions in the body of Christ were growing and it needed to be addressed.

Turn back to Acts 2 (see we haven't really left our study of Acts), when we go back to Acts 2 we note that the early believers met daily to be taught and to fellowship with other believers. They were devoted to each other. They even established the practice of having communion daily as they met. The Lord had instituted this ordinance the night before He was crucified and He wanted them to keep this practice until He returned. The Lord never stated how often it was to be observed only that it was to be observed until His return. Over time as the church got more settled, they went from a daily observance to a periodic observance. It may have been once a week or once a month. The observance of the Lord's Supper was preceded by a meal called the Agape or Love Feast. It was a precursor to our potluck dinners. They may have taken the idea from when the Lord instituted the ordinance. Gathered together Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover dinner and then following the meal Jesus took the bread and the cup and instituted what we know call the Lord's Supper. So maybe they were following that pattern. They would meet and people would bring something to pass around and then they would observe the Lord's Supper.

Here's the problem. The Corinthians would take communion without having communion. They observed the ceremony but had no unity. They would gather together in the fellowship hall for the meal but the well to do were gorging themselves while the poor went away hungry. Those who brought more wouldn't share with those who couldn't afford to bring a lot. What was supposed

to be a celebration in love for what Christ had done had turned into a gluttonous event and to make matters worse some were getting drunk. In a few verses Paul would rail on them that if they were going to behave that way, do it at home, not at church. The very act and intent of the Lord's Supper was being profaned. Many were selfish never once considering the needs of others in this love feast. Their observance of the love feast and communion was not honoring to the Lord. It was a mockery of what it really stood for.

One commentator said that "the Lord's Supper should have been the remembrance of a preeminently selfless act, Christ's death on behalf of others. Instead the Corinthians had turned the memorial of selflessness into an experience of selfishness and had made a rite of unity a riotous disunity. While one brother went hungry because he lacked the means to eat well, another brother drank to excess."

Rather than drawing the body into common praise for what Christ did, it was an appalling celebration of gluttony and selfishness. Earlier in this letter (8:12) Paul noted that to sin against another believer is to sin against Christ Himself. It didn't bother some of them in the least that they were treating others in this way, all the while thinking that they are honoring the Lord in their observing communion. In the next chapter Paul will stress that as believers we are all part of the same body. Therefore, and especially when observing communion, there should be unity. Unity begins with humility. Without humility there is no unity and without unity there is no community. As I have said unity is the foundation of community.

Paul will challenge our thinking in **verse 27** where he notes that we are not to come to the Lord's Table in such an unworthy manner. To sum up here, Paul is saying it would be better not to have communion than to abuse it. This was a far cry from Acts 2

where there was a beautiful picture of fellowship and unity among the early church.

Paul then gives a command about communion, but it's not his command. This command came from the Lord Himself.

## II. A COMMANDMENT ABOUT COMMUNION – v. 23-25

This isn't Paul's opinion about communion, he quotes a direct revelation he had received from the Lord Himself about this ordinance.

When the Lord broke the bread and stated that it was His body, the breaking of bread meant that it was to be shared, passed around. His body wasn't to be selfishly kept by the individual. What Christ did was a benefit to others. The bread is a way of remembering that Christ is with us always. He told the disciples on the night of His betrayal that He couldn't always be with them physically, there was a time He would have to depart, but He would return. In the meantime He would send a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would be the presence of Christ in the believer until His return. It is a reminder of His incarnation, that God the Son became human for us. Without His becoming human He could not provide for us what we so desperately needed – reconciliation with God. They didn't know it at the time, but this bread would be a reminder of His going to the cross to die in our place. And then Jesus told His disciples why they were to take the bread and eat it. Do it to remember. Everyone say **REMEMBER**. Remember Me. In this way you will remember that He is present with you. In this way you will remember what He taught. In this way you will remember that He came and why He came. Remember Me.

Notice in **verse 24** a very important phrase. It says **“This is My body, which is for you.”** Underline those two words **“for you.”** Now make it personal. **“This is My body, which is for ME.”**

What Jesus did, He did for you and for me, for each one of us. He did this for those who will believe. When you go back to the gospel accounts of the Last Supper you will notice that the one unbeliever among them was absent. Judas Iscariot who would betray Jesus had left. Those who were present at the time He established this ordinance were His true believers. Communion is for believers and while we practice an open communion meaning that any and all are free to observe this ordinance with us, you don't have to be a member of this church to participate but you do have to be saved. Communion is a way to remember that Jesus died for me and this very belief in Christ has brought each of us together in union.

Following the distribution of the bread, Jesus then passed the cup around and stated that the cup was the new covenant that would be made with His blood. In the Old Testament a covenant was always ratified with an animal sacrifice. The blood of the sacrifice was shed as a seal between the two making the covenant. Jesus shed His own blood as the seal of the covenant and needed to do so only once.

### Hebrews 9:11-15, 26-28

One author notes “by the use of this covenant sign God signifies His bestowal of salvation upon His people, sealed and paid for by the shedding of Jesus' blood.”

### Hymn #354 – I Cannot Tell

In my very act of taking the bread and the cup, I remember Jesus' sacrifice for me.

Paul condemned them for their abuse of communion and then gave them a command that came from the Lord, a reminder that communion was to be observed as a way of remembering Him. Communion not only points back to the work of Christ on the cross but it also considers the present and looks to the future when He will come again.

### III. COMMUNICATION ABOUT COMMUNION – v. 26

Notice two things in this verse. In a very real sense communion is a sermon. It's your sermon really. When you observe communion it speaks to others that you are identifying with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. You are telling others that you believe Jesus died for your sins and that you have trusted Christ for salvation. Now, communion does not in any way save a person. **Ephesians 2:8-9** does not say that by grace through taking communion you're saved. It says by grace through faith you are saved. Everyone repeat "GRACE through FAITH."

You're preaching a sermon that Jesus paid it all.

**I Peter 1:18-19**

**I Peter 2:24**

**I Peter 3:18**

Communion is a public declaration of faith in Christ. **A saying has been attributed to Abraham Lincoln that says "you can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."** Taking communion might fool me or someone else that you are saved when you are really not, but you'll never fool God. He knows those who belong to Him. Remember that when you take communion, you proclaim His death. If you aren't saved and you take communion you mock the Lord, because to you His death has no significance.

Notice next the other thing that you proclaim when you take communion. You proclaim that Jesus is coming again. He must be resurrected if He is returning. What you are saying is that this world is just temporary. I don't really belong here, my real home is in heaven. You proclaim that Jesus didn't just die and stay dead and buried in that grave, but that He rose again, that He is living. Eventually He will come again.

This verse then tells me two things.

The first thing it tells me is that I need to be RIGHT with Him. I need to have my spiritual house in order. I need to have a personal relationship with Christ by trusting in Him for salvation. It is a decision that shouldn't be put off. Be right with God and the only way to do that is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That's His words not mine.

Today they tell you to believe what you want because everyone will eventually get to heaven. If you believe that you believe a lie. John writes that only if you have the Son of God will you have eternal life. If you don't have the Son you don't have life. Pure and simple. You can follow the crowd, the popular opinion that says you can do what you want or believe what you want, but then don't be surprised when you stand before God one day and He says depart from Me, I don't know you. God knows His own. Be right with God.

The verse also says to me that if Jesus is coming back someday, I not only need to be right with Him, I need to be READY for Him.

**I John 3:2-3**

If you are expecting company, you do what you can to prepare for their arrival. You busy yourself cleaning and making sure everything is in order. It should be the same with preparing for Christ's return. **Would He find that my character and my conduct and my conversation are pleasing to Him? Would they meet His standard?** Hey, I didn't set the standard, He did. We need to be ready. Communion should be a time of remembering the commitment we made to follow Him, to be like Him.

**So what do we do if we are not right with Him or if we are not ready for Him?** The rest of the passage notes that communion is a time of confession.



## IV. COMMUNION IS A TIME OF CONFESSION – v. 27-34

If we come to this observance in a very careless or casual manner we bring guilt upon ourselves. That's how the Corinthians were observing it. There was little thought about Christ and what He did or who He was in their participation. They only thought about themselves. It is not speaking so much about the person being unworthy, although if we have unconfessed sin we ignore the purpose Jesus died in the first place; it is however, speaking about the manner or the way in which we approach it. It ought to be a very solemn time. We are reflecting on the death of the Lord who died for our sin. It should be a very sobering time to contemplate that if Jesus hadn't gone to the cross and took my sin, I would and should be there dying for my own sin. But He died for me. So when I hold the bread and cup in my hand I should be thinking and remembering what Jesus did so that I won't have to encounter God's wrath for my sin.

Paul says we need to examine ourselves. The word was used by assayers who tested the purity of metal to see if it was genuine. If the Corinthians had properly tested themselves, Paul wouldn't have needed to write in condemnation about them. There would have been a spirit of genuine unity.

So we need to examine ourselves to ensure that we are coming to the table in a right manner with the right motive. We shouldn't let our minds wander around thinking about the ball game that we want to watch later today or the errands we need to run this week or the test we have tomorrow. Paul is saying that our focus needs to be on Christ and what He did for us. **Am I right with Him? Am I ready for His return?** Paul even goes so far as to say that the reason some were weak or sick or had died was because they failed to properly discern the manner in which they came to the Lord's Supper. God was judging them for their cavalier attitude. Paul says it would be better for us to judge ourselves and

confess any sin so that we aren't judged by God. Two things result. The first result is that we can take communion because our spirit is clear and the second result is that there will be unity in the body.

And so communion is a time of confession to address any sins, to seek forgiveness from someone I have offended so that we can come in a worthy manner. Be specific. Name them. Don't just cast a blanket statement "forgive me for all my sins." Even though God knows, tell Him what you did, what you said or what you thought. When you name them, you are agreeing with God that it was sin and needs to be confessed.

So before we come together around the Lord's Table today I close with one final brief point. Communion is about community.

## V. COMMUNION IS ABOUT COMMUNITY

Paul's desire was to see unity in the body. A unique relationship exists between those that have placed their faith in Christ. It is a relationship that never existed before Christ died on the cross. Being one in Christ we are brought into community. As a community communion is not only a time of confession it is also a time of corporate celebration, a time to give God praise for His forgiveness of sins and the fellowship we share both now and someday together in heaven for eternity. As we take the bread and cup, in your time of silence take time both to confess and to celebrate so that there is community, so that there is unity in the body.

As we take the bread and the cup together His command is to do this as a way of remembering His death – until He comes again. Even so come Lord Jesus. Until He does – remember.