

Remember Jesus

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

**Baxter T. Exum (#1622)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is good to be together this morning! After we study the word of God, we plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper together; so, if you do not yet have the elements for the Supper, this would be a good time to get those from the table right inside the front door. And then, following the Lord's Supper, Noah/Chris will lead us in several songs before we dismiss [for class]. If you are visiting with us today, we'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online. The QR code (and the web address) is on the wall up here, on the bulletin board in the entryway, and also on the front of today's bulletin.

Thank you to all of you who brought items for Shults-Lewis over the past several weeks! Don and Jim stopped by this past Thursday morning, and they were impressed. These two men are basically the maintenance crew down there, and Jim (the guy on the left) just recently retired after a long career at UPS! After roughly 30 years at UPS, he said he decided he couldn't take one more Christmas season, so he retired and is now working at Shults-Lewis. He is now in the perfect role. Instead of delivering packages, he is now driving all over Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, picking up supplies for the kids, and we are thankful for his service.

As we get started, I'd like to share another note from someone who has been studying their way through our Bible correspondence course program. Sometimes our students have some very good questions, and this is an example of that, coming to us from Stephanie, who lives in Missouri. Stephanie says,

I heard something that caused me some confusion. When we die, our spirit goes to heaven or hell (is what I thought), right? But then I heard someone say, "When Christ returns, he's going to take the already deceased first." Are they not already in heaven (or hell)? If not, WHERE ARE THEY? Just sitting in the ground stuck??? Walking among us? I am so confused by this as it has gone against EVERYTHING I have thought this entire time ☹️. I thought when we died, we immediately went to heaven or hell. Please help me understand.

What a great question! We responded with a personal note along with a six-page article on this issue, written by Wayne Jackson. And we are hoping this helps answer her question. I share this as a reminder that many people are studying the Bible with us, with well over a thousand lessons graded and returned every month. And sometimes, questions like this come up in the course of study, and we are more than happy to try to answer those questions. I would ask that we keep these students in our prayers as they study.

Before we get to our study of the word this morning, we have a God-given responsibility to be as clear as we possibly can in explaining God's plan for saving us. Most of us get to a point in life where we have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and we choose to do wrong. This creates something of a break in our relationship with God. Thankfully, God made a way for us to come back. He sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He came to this earth, lived a perfect life, he offered himself for us on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. In response, God calls on us to believe this good news, to turn away from sin, to confess Jesus as being the Son of God, and to obey him in the act of baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And once again, we do have some good news this morning! A week or so ago, we got an update from the Lord's church in Honolulu, Hawaii, that Kai Wang has obeyed the gospel. They say, "Praise God for her decision to put on Christ in baptism." They had a video that went along with this, and it was absolutely beautiful, to see this woman put her faith in God, demonstrated in the act of baptism, making her appeal to God for a good conscience (according to 1 Peter 3:21). So, we are thankful for Kai's decision, and we invite you to follow her example today. Please, let us know if we can help in any way.

This morning, we'll be looking at a request from one of our seniors. He was asking that we set aside some time to study the Lord's Supper. We actually studied the Lord's Supper just over a year ago (in June 2020), on what was actually our first Sunday to come back together after being shut down for a few weeks (from March through early June). But this is something we need to study on a regular basis, because the Supper itself is something we do on a regular basis – once a week, 52 times every year. As far as I can tell, I have participated in the Lord's Supper with all of you just over 1100 times over the past 21 years.

Most of us will admit, though, that COVID has been a special challenge when it comes to observing the Lord's Supper. Several weeks ago, Jerrie Barber, a gospel preacher, posted an article online, and the title is, "The Lord's Supper: Save it from COVID." And in that article, he points out that one of the most disruptive things about COVID-19 has been the Lord's Supper. And we understand this. We can study the word of God online, we can find ways to give, we can certainly pray on our own, singing is something of a challenge, but the Lord's Supper, this communal event, has been a real challenge. On our last service together back in March 2020, we sat on every other row, and the men walked with the trays so the rest of us wouldn't have to touch anything. Then, when we were completely unable to meet together, we shared recipes, didn't we? Ruth Conrad's recipe is on the wall up here. We encouraged each other to partake alone or with our families, which we did. The picture on the right was taken on the island in our kitchen at home. Then, when we came back together, we used the disposable sauce containers (a 1-ounce cup with the juice, inside a larger 4-ounce cup with the bread). After the surge in November 2020, we then switched to the commercially packaged units, with the double peel-off lids. These were in high demand, they were more expensive, but they were quite convenient. We had used these once before while visiting a small congregation in Washington, DC, a number of years ago.

In his article on this, brother Jerrie said that in one extreme case, a brother led the prayer for the bread, but as Jerrie was still struggling with the seal for the bread, they had already moved on to the prayer for the juice. So here he is, trying to think about the Lord's blood as he's still trying to peel the lid off the bread. And we've had the same struggles here. Several months ago, one of our seniors told me that she made it home with the bread still sealed up between two layers of plastic. When she went to rip the top layer, the whole thing came off, exposing the juice before she could ever get to the bread. So here she is holding the bread, completely sealed, and the rest of us are already moving on to the juice. How frustrating! What a sad commentary on COVID, to come home from church with the Lord's Supper bread still sealed in plastic! Twice now, we've had song-leaders

late to the podium, because they were struggling with the packaging. This was made a bit worse about a month ago, when we found a new manufacturer. The new ones taste better, but they are slightly more difficult to open. But again, how frustrating! Instead of focusing on the body and the blood of the Lord, sometimes we struggle to even unwrap the elements. We can't even get to the bread and the juice. So, it's not perfect, by any means.

This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to a passage in 1 Corinthians 11, and I want us to study a passage that was written in response to another challenge. It wasn't a pandemic, but in the verses leading up to this passage, Paul condemns the church for abusing the Lord's Supper by treating it as a common meal. The rich were filling up and getting drunk on it, while the poor were being overlooked completely and going away hungry. Do we see some parallels here? The church is having a problem, the church is facing a challenge, and Paul writes with some words of correction.

And what I always find interesting about this passage is that these are the first written words explaining the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians was almost certainly written before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, making this the first written account not only of the Lord's Supper, but really, the first written record of anything Jesus ever said. So, I hope we appreciate this: Because the church had a problem, we now have the word of God! And maybe in a slightly similar way, because we are facing some challenges of our own, and because one of our seniors has asked about it, we are now studying the word of God. Without the problem, without the challenge, we wouldn't be looking to God for a solution.

This morning, then, let's go back to the very basics by looking at the first written words on this – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

So, what we are looking at here is what we sometimes refer to as the "Last Supper," the last meal before the Lord's death. Often, the custom on death row is to allow the prisoner to choose his last meal. Many will choose something elaborate. But in this case, Jesus is eating the Passover, and he takes two very simple elements from that meal to establish a permanent memorial. This memorial, then, comes from the Lord himself. And Paul emphasizes that here, ***"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you."*** This is from Jesus himself. If there was something really important we needed to do, my grandmother would sometimes refer to it as "an order from headquarters." This right here is "an order from headquarters." This comes from Jesus himself, and it goes back to ***"the night in which he was betrayed."*** As he was in the process of being betrayed, Jesus ate his last meal, and he used it to establish a memorial. And Jesus shared this with Paul directly. And again, this is the first written record of it. So, we are looking at the basics.

We will get to the two elements in just a moment, but as we just start to get into this passage, I want us to focus on the fact that the purpose of this memorial is to REMEMBER JESUS. And this would certainly be the main point of our study today. The goal of the Lord's Supper is to REMEMBER, to remember the Lord Jesus. As most of you know, we've done quite a bit of thinking about the ability to ***"remember"*** in our family lately. Memory is an amazing thing. There's a science to it – how memories are made, how memories are stored, how memories are

triggered later in life (by sights or smells or in other ways), how our memories are lost (over time or due to disease), the difference between short-term and long-term memories. We have good memories that we try to hang on to, and we may have bad memories (sometimes so terrible we need the help of a professional to try to forget). We could go on and on with this, but one thing almost all of us have in common is a tendency to forget. We forget names, and faces, and phone numbers, and appointments, and where we put our keys. And so, we develop tools and tricks to help us remember. We make lists, we organize, we write notes, we use a calendar, we rely on our phones or computers, we tie the proverbial string around the finger. And sometimes, we establish memorials. This is what the Lord's Supper is, a memorial. In the Old Testament, they sometimes used piles of stones as memorials (to remember the dead or to remember great events, like the crossing of the Jordan River). What we have here in 1 Corinthians 11, though, is a meal, a permanent memorial. Instead of an obelisk or an engraved slab of marble, instead of something over in Jerusalem that we would need to travel to see (excluding most of us from ever seeing it), the Lord's Supper is a meal, accessible to all people, of all times, of all cultures, in all places – it's something we can touch, and taste, and see, and smell, and share. The elements are vivid, yet simple and accessible almost anywhere on earth.

At this point, we might be tempted to ask: How could we as God's people ever forget the Lord? Well, the people in Corinth did, didn't they? They had wandered, they had drifted away from the original intent of the Lord's Supper, and they were distracted by the food itself. They had taken the elements and turned it into a common meal, forgetting Jesus in the process, and so Paul has to direct them back to the Supper, not as a meal, not as nourishment, but as a memorial. And I think we've already established this morning that we can also get distracted. I hope it is okay to admit this, but there are times when it is very difficult for even me (as the preacher) to worship. I'm up here with my finger on the button, and my mind can very easily get distracted by hitting this button at the right time during our songs, even to the point that I look back and I have no memory of the actual words in the songs. That's Satan right there. I think of our tech guy, who hasn't sat next to his wife for worship for a year or more – it's important work (switches, and dials, and buttons, and keyboards), it makes worship accessible to those who cannot be here in person, but at what cost? What a distraction to overcome! Or I think of our elders who have also not been able to partake of the Lord's Supper with their own wives for a year or more, because they've been up here leading those prayers. Or, the rest of us might get so distracted and frustrated by the wrapper that we fail to truly think about the Lord and his sacrifice. It's easy, then, to focus more on the supper than the Lord. The supper, though, was designed to help us remember. Our goal each Lord's Day is to remember Jesus. And specifically, are to remember his death, his sacrifice.

This week, we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. During World War II, a common rallying cry was to "Remember Pearl Harbor." We remember defeats of the past to keep us focused on the present. And this is what the Lord's Supper is. We remember the Lord and his death. Twice in this passage, Jesus tells us to ***"do this in remembrance of Me."*** Short and to the point. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we remember Jesus. He is our focus. He is our reason for coming together. We remember him.

I. **And this brings us to the Supper itself, and we find that with the first element, the BREAD, we are to REMEMBER THE LORD'S BODY.**

Starting in the middle of verse 23, Paul says, ***"...that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'"*** The bread represents the Lord's body. Just as we have a body, so also Jesus had a body. As John explains in John 1, Jesus is the Word, and ***"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*** The bread also reminds us that Jesus really suffered and died. And to me, it's strange that we are called to remember

something we never experienced in the first place. We weren't there when it happened, but we remember. We remember by reading the eye-witness accounts. We remember the Lord's body. We remember how God came to this earth in human form, born into a poor family. We remember his sinless life. We remember the words he spoke, the miracles he performed. We remember his betrayal, the unlawful arrest, and the denial by Peter, one of his closest friends. We remember the unjust trial held under the cover of darkness, in the middle of the night. We remember the false accusations made against him. We remember the abuse he endured for us – the multiple beatings, the scourging, the mocking, the crown of thorns; being blindfolded, and spit on, slapped in the face, carrying his own cross. We remember the nails in his hands and feet and the spear in his side. We remember his violent and excruciating death, the most unjust death in all of world history.

And according to Paul, Jesus says, ***"This is my body, which is for you."*** In other words, he suffered for us. In his body, Jesus took on the punishment we deserved. He took our place. He suffered and died instead of us. In a sense, then, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we put ourselves at the foot of the cross, and we remember it, as if we were actually there, because we truly deserved to be there. The guilt (the weight) of all of our sin fell on him – all of our lying, and pride, all of our sexual immorality, every careless word. He was treated like a sinner, because I am a sinner. And so, as we partake of the bread, we remember, ***"This is my body, which is for you."*** By partaking of the bread, we remember the Lord's body.

II. This leads us to the second part of the Lord's Supper, as we find that the FRUIT OF THE VINE (THE CUP) is meant to help us REMEMBER HIS BLOOD.

As Paul says in verse 25, ***"In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'"*** This is where we remember (once again) that the Lord's death was not an accident. He didn't die in his sleep one night, he didn't trip and fall off a cliff, he didn't die of old age, but rather, he was slaughtered. He didn't just die, he was killed. His death was bloody. Later (in the order they were written), we have more information in the gospel accounts. In Matthew 26:27-28, Jesus takes the cup and gives thanks and says, ***"Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."*** In Mark 14:24, Jesus says, ***"This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."*** In Luke 22:20, Jesus says, ***"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."*** So, all three gospel accounts refer to the Lord's blood being ***"poured out."*** This describes a sacrifice.

And it was truly one of the most painful ways to die – suffocation, exhaustion, hunger, thirst, exposure, heart failure, extreme pain, and blood loss – all rolled into one, over a period of six hours. The word "excruciating," in fact, goes back to Latin and literally means "out of the cross." The most graphic word we have, to describe the worst pain possible, is a word referring to crucifixion. And he did this for us, as a sacrifice. His blood wasn't "spilled," but his blood was ***"poured out."*** His blood was "offered." As we learn in the gospel accounts, his blood was poured out ***"for forgiveness of sins."*** He refers to the cup, in fact, as the ***"blood of the covenant."*** This is a reference to the first covenant, which was ratified with blood (in Exodus 24:8). We might also think of the Passover (in Exodus 12), when the lamb was killed and the blood spread on the doorposts. This was an intentional act. And then, throughout the Old Testament, whenever someone sinned, they had to offer the blood of an animal in their place, as a substitute. Again, an intentional act. In the same way, the blood of Jesus was also ***"poured out"*** for the forgiveness of sins.

By the way, that phrase ***"for the forgiveness of sins"*** is associated not only with the blood of Jesus, but it is also used by Peter (in Acts 2:38) with reference to baptism, as Peter tells the people, ***"Repent, and each of you be***

baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism, then, is the point at which our sins are forgiven. Baptism is the point in time where our sins are covered by Jesus' blood. But the point for us today is: The cup causes us to remember the blood of Jesus.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of our study this morning, I'd like for us to ask the **"SO WHAT?"** question. Here at the Four Lakes congregation in December 2021, what does this passage mean for us today?

I would suggest, first of all, that we **COME TO THE TABLE**. We are living in strange times. I realize that some of you are unable to come together due to various risk factors. The Lord knows. Some of you, at this very moment, might be waiting for a COVID test to come back. You are protecting us right now, and we appreciate that. At the same time, the rest of us need to realize that all of life is a risk. Can we guarantee the safety of everybody in this building? No, we cannot. We've given ourselves room to spread out with two services, we've added the HEPA filters, we've rearranged the format of our services to allow us the option of getting out right after we are done singing. But there is some risk involved. Any one of us might be infecting the rest of us right at this moment. But I also know that the Lord's Supper is pictured as a meal. In the gospel accounts, they reclined at a table. In 1 Corinthians 10:21, Paul refers to ***"the table of the Lord."*** In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul refers to the cup of blessing as a ***"sharing in the blood of Christ,"*** and he refers to the bread which we break as ***"a sharing in the body of Christ."*** When we partake, we share. This is something we do together. So, we might picture this as a family meal where we all sit down together. Yes, we can all eat on our own in our separate rooms (some families do that, we do that), but there is a value to eating together. We might think of celebrating something like an anniversary. I am not the world's most perfect husband, but I think I do a pretty good job remembering anniversaries. What if, on our next anniversary, I call my wife at work and say, "Hey, happy anniversary! To celebrate, I've made us some reservations. I'll be eating down here at Quivey's Grove, and you can eat at Otto's on the way home. Our reservations are both at 5 o'clock, so at 5 o'clock we can think about each other." Do you think she might go for that? We would both be fed, we would both have a great meal, but do we see a problem with that? Yes, there is a value to spending time together. In the same way, the Lord's Supper was designed by the Lord to be shared, as a family, as a congregation. Come to the table!

By the way, one positive of these little cups? One good thing we can say? It's easy to make fun of these. Several months ago, a friend posted online and said, "One way we'll know the Pandemic is over is when we no longer partake of Styrofoam and Robitussin for the Lord's Supper." These are actually unleavened bread and grape juice, but they are easy to criticize. One positive thing, though? I don't know whether you have noticed this, but when we use something like this, we are literally partaking together, at the exact same moment. Back in the olden days, when we passed the trays like barbarians, we were partaking one after the other as those trays moved through this room. Now, though, we truly do partake together, at the same moment. I am thankful for that.

So, first of all, based on this passage, I would encourage you to come to the table. If you can't, you can't, and we understand that. But if I am shopping during the week, if I'm going to school or work, if I'm going to ball games and restaurants, if I'm going to movies and other appointments, then I also need to come to the table. This is the most important appointment I can ever honor in this life.

I would suggest a second answer to the "So what?" question, and that is, based on what we have learned in this passage, I would also suggest that we actually **TAKE TIME TO REMEMBER**. I cannot "remember" if I only have

three seconds to remember AND get this little plastic thing open. I am thankful when my fellow shepherds take a moment to read an appropriate passage. Reading the word of God helps us remember why we are doing what we are doing. John does such a good job at this. I'm thankful that Aaron tries to make sure we "do the shake" and get it ready. Again, we cannot "remember" until we get this thing ready to go. But somehow, we need to take a few moments to remember. I know, silence is sometimes a bit weird for us, especially in a public assembly like this. But it is okay to be quiet sometimes. Close your eyes, think of a song, read a verse from the word of God. In the verses that come after this passage, Paul will go on to tell us to "**examine**" ourselves. That is, we are to open our hearts, comparing our behavior this week to what we know to be right in the word of God. I don't examine you during the Lord's Supper; I examine myself. But whatever we do, my encouragement is that we truly take time to REMEMBER.

And that's where we come to the very end of this passage, where Paul says, "***For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.***" What we are doing here is a proclamation. By eating the bread and drinking the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We remember his body and his blood.

Before we partake of the Supper together, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning for giving your only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Thank you, Father, for that indescribable gift. Thank you for making a way for us to come back to you. We pray that everything we do today is acceptable in your sight.

We come to you in the name of your Son, Jesus, our Passover lamb. Lord, come quickly, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com