

Why Do We... Take Communion So Often?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2022

Preacher: Chris Thornton

[0 : 0 0] Today's passage is from 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We're starting in verse 17. But in the following instructions, I do not commend you, because when you come together, it is not for the better but for the worse.

For in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

What? Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

What shall I say to you? Should I commend you in this? No, I will not. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread.

[1 : 1 5] 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.

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.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, 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.

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

[2 : 3 2] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for judgment.

About the other things, I will give directions when I come. This is the word of God. Thank you so much, Karen. Good morning, everyone.

Okay, that's not bad. Great. Good morning. My name is Chris. I'm one of the leaders here at Watermark, and it's just really exciting to be here and to preach God's word as we're going to talk on communion, which I don't think I have preached a sermon here at Watermark ever on communion.

So let's just start by praying and asking God to just speak to us today. Father, we thank you that your word is like a sword that penetrates, that cuts between the very deepest parts of our soul and our marrow and every part of our bones, and it breaks through into areas of our lives where we have kept hidden for so long, and it wants to expose us so that it wants to heal us and to make us truly the people you've made us to be.

And I pray this morning you would do that. I pray wherever we've come from, wherever we are right now, that your word would do its work in our lives so that we might be the people you've called us to be.

[4 : 03] We might live in the freedom you have bought for us, and we might enjoy what it really means to be a redeemed, loved, restored people of God who are your family together.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Great. So we're going through this series, basically a back-to-basics series, looking at why do we do what we do.

And we've said that if you lose your why, then the what of what you do can become dry and lose its life. But when you know why you're doing what you do, then actually that can reinvigorate and bring freshness and life to the things that we do on a regular basis.

And we've looked at why we gather on Sundays. Last week, Kevin looked at why do we always talk about the gospel? And today we're going to talk about why do we take communion? Now, kind of before I start, it's worth noting that food and meals shape culture.

Because the British eat to live, but the Hong Kongers live to eat. Because actually Hong Kong's got it better, more biblical than the British actually, because food is more, and meals are more than gaining nutrients for life.

[5 : 24] They're actually about strengthening relationships, about forming identities together. They're a communal thing. You know, I've always been incredibly amazed at how my wife's extended family, at festivals, they all get together, and at these restaurants, where the food quality is really poor, the service is terrible, and yet they love it.

And it's overpriced as well. Why? Because what's happening is it's strengthening their sense of being a family together. And when families stop eating together, that's always a sign of dysfunction in their relationships, right?

We know that. Because who you eat with displays who you identify with. It displays where your loyalty is and where your allegiance is. And so this passage, let me just talk a little bit about the context of the passage that we're looking at today in Corinth.

Because in the ancient world, the meal tables you had, eating was a chance to network. It was a chance to get into certain social circles. A chance to get benefits.

You know, like in mainland, if you want to get some business deals, you'll eat together and drink together and form guanxi, won't you? To be able to form those relationships. Well, the same would happen in ancient world.

[6 : 50] And often meals would take place at pagan temples where the food was devoted to idols. And Paul has already talked about this in the book of Corinthians because their meals in the world around them were often self-serving, they were self-indulgent, and they were idolatrous.

And in Corinth, many of the new Christians who'd come out of that were bringing the same thinking of the pagan world into the church. And here was a church made up, this house church of about 15 to maybe 50 people maximum, made up of rich and poor who would gather together and be hosted in the home of a wealthy person.

I think we might have a, do we have a picture? Okay, here's a picture. Of a kind of home that they found in Corinth of a wealthy person. And what would happen is the rich people, they didn't need to work so they would come early and they'd get seated in the kind of seated area and there'd be nice food, that would be served to them and there'd be free-flowing wine.

And it was a great time, it was a party for them, catching up with all their kind of wealthy friends. And then the slaves and the lower classes would come later because they got off work and then there'd be nowhere for them to sit so they'd just be standing room only.

There'd be no food left for them so they'd be hungry. And all the time then they'd have their worship gathering together where they were talking about Jesus, praying about Jesus, they were taking communion together and Paul basically lays into them, he's got pretty strong language in this passage, and he says three times, when you come together, guys, and that's a technical term for when you meet as a church, when you gather together, he says firstly, you can go back to that slide, firstly, you actually do more harm than good.

[8 : 36] It's not for better, it's for worse. Secondly, he says, it looks more like Lan Kui Fong than the church of God. Your divisions between the haves and the have-nots reflect more your loyalty to the way the world operates than to the people of God that God has created.

And he said, thirdly, in light of those two things, when you come together, it's not the Lord's Supper you're taking because your own behavior is despising the very people Christ died to bring into his family.

And he says this, he says, for in eating, each of you goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, the other gets drunk. What? I mean, I like how Karen said it. What?

Can you see, he's not a happy bunny at this point. What? Don't you have houses to eat and drink in? If you want to have a private party, do it in your own time. Don't despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing.

What's he saying? He's saying, it is possible to make a mockery out of communion if you don't get what it's all about. That's the point.

[9 : 47] It's possible to make a mockery out of communion if you don't understand what it's about. And so what I want us to do is just go through, firstly, what is communion?

Okay? Very briefly. And then we'll look at why we take communion and then how we are to take communion. Because in verses 23 to 26, Paul basically goes back to basics and says, okay, let me show you what communion is.

Let me take you back to the first communion Lord's Supper meal that Jesus instituted and he says, I received from the Lord what I delivered to you and he's then going to go on and tell us about the meal.

But what's he saying? Just spin this phrase. He's saying communion is not a man-made ritual. It's not like a shot of grace that's just infused into you in some way.

It is a practice that is commanded by Jesus. And if Jesus commanded it to his church to be handed down from generation to generation of believers, you've got to believe that this is important.

[10 : 55] And just as we depend on food and drink to live. So what communion is proclaiming? It is a tangible, tasted proclamation declaring that our very lives and our community life is entirely dependent on Jesus.

Entirely shaped by Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection. It proclaims the Lord's death and that's a catch-all for the gospel.

That's what communion is. It's a proclamation. It's a proclamation of Jesus and all that he is and that we depend on him. So why do we take communion?

Like, what's the big deal? Okay, it's a bit of bread, it's a bit of wine. Well, the main reason that he gives here is to celebrate Jesus. And we're going to unpack this in a little bit.

But it's to celebrate Jesus. Here's what he says. The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread. When he'd given thanks, he broke it and he said, this is my body, which is for you.

[12 : 02] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, he took the cup after Sava, saying, this is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

You see, the Corinthians had made the whole meal about themselves and they were the host of the meal. Basically, they did things their way.

But in the Lord's Supper, Jesus is the host of the meal. And you notice in here, who's doing all the action? It's Jesus. Jesus, he gave thanks.

Jesus broke the bread. He is the one who offers himself to us in the bread and wine. You see, it's personal. It's not just abstract.

It's personal from Jesus to us, to the original disciples and then to us. And so that means how we respond to communion is how we respond to Jesus.

[13 : 03] And how do we respond? Well, he says, we're called to do this communion thing in remembrance of him. Now, that's a strange thing to say, in remembrance, because in the Bible, to forget doesn't mean to go, like to forget some information.

Go, Jesus, yeah, that kind of name rings a bell. That's not what forget means. Forget means you turn in your heart away from God. That's what it means biblically.

And so then, to remember Jesus is not to go, oh yeah, Jesus, he died for me. It's actually to recall his life, his death, and resurrection for the purpose of celebrating and rekindling your love for him.

You know, I had an elderly friend once who, she had this little pendant with her, you know, around her neck, which had her and her husband's picture in it. And she would take it out and every time she'd recall the memories of her and her husband together.

And as she did, you could see her face kind of light up. And that remembrance warmed her heart to her husband and his love for her and it actually strengthened their marriage bond in some kind of way.

[14 : 20] We know that when you rehearse with like an old friend and you go back over the stories and something, it just carries that bond together. Well, in some kind of similar way, when we take communion, what it's meant to do as we intentionally recall how Jesus has loved us, you know, you're meant to intentionally do that.

It's meant to warm your heart and strengthen your love for him. You know, one of the things I do, often before I take communion, I recall how I was in a period of real darkness for about four years of my life and Jesus brought me out of that.

And a lot of that was because of my own sinfulness. And as I stop and think about that and I think, but Jesus died even for me, that then refreshes and makes me delight again and say, wow, isn't Jesus' love incredible?

That's what it's meant to do for us. Because in a world of performance and a world of busyness, we often forget his love, don't we?

So it's to remember Jesus, to celebrate him and to enjoy him again. But how do we do that? What else are we trying to remember about Jesus and what he's done for us?

[15 : 37] Well, there's three things that I think we are to celebrate. Firstly, we're to celebrate that Jesus died to set us free.

I don't know if you know this meal. Who did the Seder meal on Easter Thursday with us? Okay, a few of you. Some of you need to go back next year and do it again. It was a great time.

But actually, we celebrated that kind of Passover meal. It's a Passover meal that Jesus celebrated on that Lord's Supper. And that Passover meal was a remembrance, a recalling of how God had rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land.

And Jesus and his disciples on that evening, they recounted the Exodus story and they would say as part of that, we were slaves and God brought us out.

And you go, hey, but you guys weren't there. Like, this was like 1,500 years before Jesus and his disciples. But they themselves, as every Jew since has always done, they see themselves in the story of God's deliverance.

[16 : 48] Not just a past story, but it's a present story for now. It's their story prayed out in real time. Which means this, they would break the bread and they say, this is the bread of affliction.

All who are hungry take and eat and celebrate God's deliverance for us. But what does Jesus do? He breaks the bread.

He changes the narrative. He says, this is my body which is broken for you. That you is plural by the way.

It's his people. But as part of his people, it's also personal for every single one of us. He's saying, I died to set you free.

I died for your freedom. That's not freedom from Egypt. It's not freedom from life's difficult circumstances. It's not freedom for you to do you. It's freedom from the cramped world of living for yourself and your own self-glory and self-reliance and focusing on yourself and being set free so that you can live in the spacious place which is living for God's glory and learning to love others more than yourself and to find that there is true life found in him no matter what the circumstances you're going through.

[18 : 07] And so when you come to communion and maybe you're feeling like, will I ever break free of this anger or this selfishness or this lack of self-control or this habit that has enslaved me?

When you take those elements you're proclaiming one thing in that. You're proclaiming that Jesus died to set me free from all of these things and he will set me free because he's moving me on a road to freedom and I can trust him.

That's the first thing that communion reminds us on. He's died to set us free. The second thing he tells us we celebrate that he made us his own people.

I love this part because if you get the story of what's going on God didn't just bring his people out of Egypt for them just to kind of wander by themselves in the wilderness. He rescues them from slavery to bring them to himself and then he takes them to this mountain Mount Sinai where he enters into a covenant relationship with the people there.

It's like a marriage ceremony and if you remember the Ten Commandments they start with you remember the Lord your God rescued you out of the house of slavery and then you've got actually about 613 commandments that kind of come as part of this covenant and then at the end of it most of what people don't realize in Exodus 24 is it's actually a kind of a ratification ceremony.

[19 : 41] There's a ceremony where Moses sprinkles blood on the people which was a sign that if they broke the covenant commands then they should pay for that with their own blood.

And then what happens it says the elders went up and it says they beheld God and they ate and drank. Do you see what's happened? They had a meal. They celebrated their new identity that now they were kind of married as God's people to the creator of the universe and God is the host of the meal.

I mean wouldn't you love to be a fly on the wall of that meal right? I wonder what he served. But in light of all that background Jesus picks up the cup and he says this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

This is actually amazing because the entire Old Testament story is a tragedy telling you that the people of God broke his covenant not just once not just twice but like every almost all the time constantly time after time they forgot their God they turned to idols and their blood should have been demanded from them because that was the deal that would have been fair that would have been justice that God would bring and actually the story says we are no different but Jesus is saying to sinners God doesn't write us off God doesn't say that's it you've had your chance I'm just going to move on now our failure reveals the depths of his faithfulness to us and what that means is he creates a new covenant so that you and I and we as his people can be brought back to himself and in the new covenant he places his own blood there instead of yours that's why he dies on that cross his life is poured out for the forgiveness of your sins that Jesus paid it all all to him we owe sin your sin my sin had left a crimson stain but he washed it white as snow and he's made a new way for us to have this marriage ceremony with God again in deep intimate relationship with God do you know

God actually wants a relationship with you some of us wonder communion is meant to remind you he's done everything that he's he's running to bring you back to himself but here's the thing he died to make you own but you his own but it's not just you you and Jesus in a kind of little love in okay the covenant the new covenant isn't just between God and you the new covenant is between God and his people his people so communion proclaims that Jesus death has broken down all the social all the economic all the racial all the personality divisions that were there in Corinth and we have in Hong Kong right now to create and to bring us together as his family so your worth and value in this community is not determined by your titles or your status or your education or your clothing or your charisma it's not determined by any of that it's only determined by one thing and one thing only and that is

[23 : 16] Jesus blood we all it's the most democratic thing in the world we all come leveled on the playing field because there's only one way we can come it's through him that's actually why you're sitting next to each other I don't know if you realize that because communion is like a marriage renewal ceremony it's like a renewal of your marriage vows celebrating how Jesus has made us his own people again we are his bride he is the heavenly husband that's actually why you can't take communion by yourself that's a snack because communion is a family meal now can I be real just for a minute here I just thought about this quite a bit because what I think most of us at Watermark do including myself at times is when we take communion we will today what we do is we'll kind of line up like no eye contact we kind of look forward go and get the elements go back to my seat and it's just me and Jesus in this beautiful kind of communion of one how is that a communal meal that's individualism now there's a moment for you and Jesus and we'll talk about that in a minute but no what you're supposed to do is look around you you're supposed to look around not just in like oh let me find my friends but you're supposed to look around and go wow isn't it incredible that I get to sit next to this person and that person they're in the family they're my family and you go and you look over and you look at he even brought an

Australian like Dan into his people wow isn't his love way more expansive than mine I don't know why we always pick on Australians I think they've just got thicker skin than everyone else right and communion is meant to not just rekindle your love for Jesus it's meant to rekindle the amazement and your love for his church and his people did you know that that means we need to start thinking and doing communion differently in our hearts and our minds hearts and because we are God's covenant people together so we celebrate that Jesus died to set us free we celebrate he died to make us his own people thirdly under why do we celebrate he died so that we can celebrate that he is also resurrected and he's coming again to restore all things you see he says this in verse 26 he says as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes you know in Corinth in the Roman

Empire many meal tables many gatherings would at some point have to proclaim Caesar the Roman Emperor is Lord when the church gathered in their homes they were doing something utterly revolutionary they were proclaiming Jesus was a king of a different kind of kingdom and while the world might look as if it's ruled by powerful people ultimately they're all under the authority of the one who is going to come back the one who is going to restore and return and rebuild and bring in his kingdom and so for those of us who are suffering right now maybe you're hurting maybe you're lonely maybe there's just struggles that you're going through for those of us who are sojourners like Kevin talked about you just feel that sense of waiting that sense of restlessness that sense of uncertainty with where you are right at this time in life weighed down by the pressures of the world around you communion proclaims that Jesus has not only inaugurated a new kingdom but he's going to come in to establish it and that means your future is utterly secure that means no believer needs to live with

FOMO ever because Christ has come and you and I has come and is coming and you and I are included in that and you know in the last book of the Bible in the book of Revelation what happens to those of us who are part of God's people who have trusted him through the storms of life and have held on to Jesus all through it what happens in the last book of the Bible there's a meal there's a wedding banquet that his people are finally reunited with their husband Christ because communion is just a little taste that this is we're looking forward it's like the hors d'oeuvre before the main meal it's like we're looking forward to him coming as our husband and restoring all things communion celebrates that he set us free it celebrates that he's made us his own we're to remember and celebrate that he's coming again to restore all things and so then in the light of all of those things in the light of this declaration and this proclamation that we're doing as we take communion how should we celebrate how should we take communion it's my third thing

I remember going to Puyo for the first time anyone been to Puyo and the first time I went it was like I was like wow this is amazing there's just the mountains and there's the beach and it's just incredible and I spoke to my friend who lives there and I said to him wow you must wake up every morning thinking you're just the most luckiest person alive you're just amazed at just living here and he turned around to me and he said huh actually I guess I've just got used to it because you know I've just been here so long it's just so familiar with me and actually you reminding me right now actually is really helpful to remember that actually this is really beautiful because familiarity breeds contempt doesn't it sometimes and I think and I speak also personally but I think for many of us we can be so used to taking communion that we've lost the wonder of communion

[30 : 11] I don't know if you're honest for a minute but I wonder how many of you actually look forward to coming and taking communion some of us were going oh let me just hear the sermon and then we rush out and we don't most of the church's history communion has actually been the center point of the church gathering I don't know if you know that the preaching is meant to lead you into communion but what that means is and I think as a church I mean I think we we can think more about how can we change things up to make things fresher I think there's a lot of things like that just you know taking just a wafer and a cracker you know a cracker and a juice it doesn't feel like a meal does it doesn't even feel like a starter sometimes and so there's we're obviously fighting against certain things just because we have to do it because of the the way you know 150 people we can't have like a full-blown meal every Sunday but in spite of all that I think we can still learn how to love Jesus more and appreciate the wonder by not just mindlessly coming to communion but actually learning how to have reminders every time we come so this meal really does what it's meant to do in our hearts and our community life and so how should we come and celebrate communion I've got two things first thing we should celebrate it seriously not flippantly okay now listen to me by seriously I don't mean like not smiling okay

I don't mean that kind of seriously okay I mean there's there's there's like a weightiness to it you know with your wedding vows okay even if the renewal of your wedding vows you you don't just go in there kind of lightly and flippantly do you do you go in there with someone going well do you take this this woman to be your wife and you go well I guess there aren't any other better options so why not right that's not what you do right you you think about it you prepare for it because you know that that is a serious moment and you're declaring something that is serious and Paul says here to the Corinthians he says in verse 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 do you know what an unworthy manner is it's it's when you're treating Jesus sacrifice so lightly by the reality of your life lived for yourself in every other area of your life or you just come and you are treating his church you're treating other people with with the contempt the

Corinthians were treating others in the church without repentance without a desire to change it just kind of walking in and that makes a mockery of what Christ died to create you know you you don't say all I have is yours in your wedding vow and then just be treating your spouse like like dirt with no desire to change without consequences and God says I will not be mocked by my people you're serious and he ramps up the level a little bit more and we need to hear this he says this he says anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself this is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died just just listen to that for a minute like let the gravity of that sentence just sink for a minute he says you can drink judgment on yourself and some of you are sick and you've even died because of it some of us actually today you need to hear that because maybe your career is your God and you think you can just kind of play around with God in your own life with Christ in your own life and what he's saying here and this is I mean I was kind of a little disturbed by this but this is what he's saying he's saying God is able to devastate your career in one instant he's able to devastate the most precious things that you are looking to apart from Christ in one instant not to be harsh but to wake you up to avoid you actually facing eternal judgment in hell and so that you can come in out of slavery to self into the freedom that he died for you to bring you into it's actually his grace that wants to wake you up you know there are people in watermark who I know that have experienced that and God is so grateful they are so grateful that God did that because they see how where their life was going you know you can say God can take away your health he can take away your relationships he can even take away your life there's a sense of a fear of

God here right and we talk about the grace of God all the time and we need to right but sometimes I think we can take that casually and we don't see the fear of God and God's disciplining judgment for those who mock his grace and we mock his grace when we just treat him flippantly and by the way let me put a caveat here don't take this as if I've just said hey you know if you take communion today and then tomorrow you get COVID that that's kind of the judgment of God has come on you and whatever I mean it could be but I'm not we're not going there because this is a broken world and there's there's different things I mean we don't be simplistic about that the point here is that communion is a health check to examine yourself that's what Paul says examine yourself so you discern the body and by that he means you discern the body of Christ's broken few what Jesus has done for you you think about his love you ask yourself each time what has Christ done for me how am I treating him and then you think about the body of Christ which is his people and you go how are my relationships how am I treating the church around me this is what communion is meant to do it's meant to be like an ECG like a heart monitor check you know Kevin can share with me about an Anglican church in Australia where I think they said they take communion about once a month or so but but before they do that they message all the members and they say hey listen we're going to take communion you've got to get all your relationships in order as far as it depends on you before you come

I wonder if we should actually do something like that because then you begin to see this actually means something you know I've have you ever been this I've done this where you come to church and I've just had a big fight with my spouse with Fiona or you know you've you've got issues with someone in your CG and it's cold war and you come in and you know like this and I'm right I'm not gonna do anything and then it comes to communion do you know for me if I know communion is coming up I'm going oh flip I've got to deal with this I've got to either apologize I've got to move towards that person and I should never take communion if I have not resolved in my heart to actually move towards whether it's broken relationships it doesn't mean you have to fix everything but it means where's your heart moving are you coming in repentance to God are you asking God to just work in you are you resolving that I need to move towards this because that's what communion is to do and by the way if you are a Christian not a Christian we actually don't take communion not because we're trying to be mean but because we don't want you to be a hypocrite and proclaim something in your life that is not true of you we want you to actually come and hear about who Christ is so that you can take communion and delight in all he has done for us so we don't come flippantly we take it seriously we confess where we need to we confess how am I treating the church around me but then in the light of that we don't stay at that point okay because you know what happens straight after you've done the wedding vows people don't go oh they go right you celebrate the set this the weightiness then transforms into joy not a kind of guilt not a not a somberness the idea is that you know in some churches they call this the Eucharist Eucharist means

[39 : 23] Thanksgiving it's meant to overflow that you know if we've examined ourselves and if we've seen and brought our sin to Christ then we can come confidently here not because we have anything to offer of ourselves but because we know that we don't get judgment when we come to Christ we get unending mercy because this meal is for people who have not got everything right this meal is for people who are not adequate this meal is for people who just have screwed up in so many ways I mean just look around you some of you look great others also look great but you know if you've experienced let me just say this is if you've experienced hurt from someone in the church what you can do sometimes is you look around and you go how can they like what right have they got to take you meaning like you know don't you know what they've done but if you've examined yourself first you realize that somebody else could say that of you and yet you are invited by the host of the meal who is

Jesus himself because his blood was not poured out for people who've done it all well it's poured out for people who know they haven't but know they need the grace of a savior and when you come and experience that you know that there is freedom for you you know that you are his and nothing can separate you from his love you know that your future is secure with him and you can celebrate Jesus and what that does is that then leads you as you look around and you look around the church and you go wow what a bunch of sinners but what a bunch of saints saved only by the blood of Jesus and that looks meant to lead you to love the church even more than you do right now that's why we take communion you