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| Topic | Gospel Celebrated in Community |
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A church had an unusual ritual every Sunday morning and so before the church sang the doxology, they would all stand up and everyone turn to right, facing a blank wall and they sang the doxology. Every Sunday without fail they did this and so a newcomer to the church was confused by this and asked, why do you do this? No one really knew and the only answer that people could come up with was, well we've always done it this way, but the answer did not satisfy the newcomer. Other people who asked the same question, finally an elderly man who had been in the church for a very-very long time remembered the reason. It seems that at one time they didn't have hymn notes or hymn books and the words to the song were painted on a large white wall, so everyone stood up, turned to the right facing the wall and sang the doxology and so over the years the words faded on the wall and the wall was repainted numerous times over the years and no one really remembered the significance of standing and turning and staring at the blank wall.

My friends, we do a lot of things in life and seldom stop to ask, why. We develop habits and traditions and if we are not careful, we can forget why we do certain things. The danger of familiar traditions is that they will become over time routine and will lose their intended power. You see my friends, there is this recognized principle, at least amongst most of us that what we wear needs to fit the occasion that we wear it to. When it came to the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians found themselves wearing the wrong clothes. Now I don't mean that they were literally wearing the wrong clothes but using the idea of clothing as a metaphor, their practice of the Lords Supper did not match the meaning of the Lords Supper and that was then but today here at FBC we can easily find ourselves wearing the wrong clothes. We can lose sight of the true meaning of the Lords Supper and consequently we can practice it inappropriately.

Well to battle against this tendency, very briefly this morning I want to draw out three principles:

1. Disunity in the Lord's Supper
2. Unity in the Lord's Supper
3. The Lord's Supper is the Ultimate proclamation of the Gospel

DISUNITY IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

'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? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.'
- *V. 17-22*

What was they doing wrong? What was Paul trying to correct? Well unlike the common practice today in the Lord's Supper where we only eat a rather small amount of bread or wine, the early church seem to practice the Lord's Supper in the context of a larger community meal. This was often known as a love feast or an agape meal. Furthermore, the homes in which the churches met back then had a large living room which could fit roughly around 10 people and everyone else had to sit outside in the larger courtyard. Now interestingly enough, the hosts in this culture were notorious for giving more food, for giving the best food and the seats in the actual house for people of a higher social class. Forcing everyone of a lower social class to go and eat outside and so the poor folk who had to work all day in the field had to come and eat the leftovers after the earlier folk had their fill. This created natural inequalities in the Corinthian community.

The Corinthians rather than living such social class distinctions brought those distinctions into the Lord's Supper and so this disunity in the practice of the Lord's Supper was in conflict with the very thing the Lord's Supper proclaims. Well, what is that? Their unity, their shared salvation, the fact that all believers are alike, come to the supper with empty hands as guests of God salvation in Jesus Christ. Any distinctions that we do have are seen as nothing in light of our communality in Christ. Therefore to maintain such social class distinction in a meal that screams the unity of believers, is horrifically and terribly flawed my dear friends. Look with me at 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.'

Mary Poppins had a very famous quote. It goes something like this, '*Just a spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down.*' Clearly in this passage, the apostle Paul did not really know Mary Poppins, neither did he follow her advice. You see

my friends; Paul is what I like to call a realist. A realist is somebody who just calls it like it is. Paul is one of those guys. He calls it like he sees it. Paul understands and even expected there to be some division. He says that in verse 19. Paul says that there must be divisions or differences amongst us and these differences don't split the church my friends, but they make evident who are truly genuine in their faith. Look at verse 18 and 19

18First of all, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19And indeed, there must be differences among you to show which of you are approved.

In other words, divisions in a church serve as a test to prove who are genuine and who are just namesake followers of Christ. That's what a division does, rather we seek to remove divisions and become unified as a church, Paul is not saying, well since you think this and since you think that, why don't both of you go and plant churches in two different parts of the town. No my friends, he is not saying that, Paul is calling them to unity.

20So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.

Paul says to the rich here, if you want to have such feasts, do it elsewhere. Such meals are not appropriate when the church gathers in unity to celebrate the Lord's Supper. My friends, the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the gospel. It relives and celebrates the incomprehensible sacrifice of the Son of God for a world of lost sinners, totally insensitive to God, totally helpless, incapable of helping themselves. The Corinthians behavior my friends betrays the very nature of the supper. It destroys the witness of the gospel and it demonstrates to the world that the gospel is useless. It makes no difference to the way that we live, the rich are still alienated from the poor, the barriers that were broken down by the love of Christ have now been erected up again and not in the common market place but in the sacred space of the Lord's Supper, the heart of the gospel. That's what has happened here and that brings us to our second point this morning.

UNITY IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

'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.' – V. 27-29

Now in one sense, the church is already unified through our spiritual union in Christ. So you can think of a Christian family or you can think of FBC as one ethnicity made up of people from different natural ethnicities, who have been reconciled to God through the cross and in another sense we have yet to experience the fullness of this unity inside the church, so what does apostle Paul tell us, we must do everything to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. You know my friends; unity is something that you have to fight for. Unity does not just happen. Unity is not the natural trajectory for a group of people, it is easy for us to find differences with people and then to divide ourselves based on those differences. There was a pastor by the name of Larry Osborne and he said this about unity

"Unity is the one thing that can't be left to chance...Unity doesn't just happen. You have to work at it day after day, because if you don't, it quickly slips away. And once it does, it won't matter how clear your vision is or how gifted your team is. When the foundation rots, it's not long until the whole house collapses."

In 2016, it was time to appoint the new president of the Southern Baptist Convention. One of the men running for the role was actually J.D. Greer and after voting nobody had the majority vote, so everyone had to vote again for just the top two candidates. One was J.D. Greer and the other one was Pastor Steven Gaines. So the next day, people went back to vote for a third time and something incredible happened. J.D. Greer and Pastor Steve Gaines actually met privately the night before and they prayed together and after this J.D. Greer withdrew his name from the candidacy. People asked why, well he did it for the sake of unity. Here is what he said,

"Through this whole process, I've been praying for unity. I know that Pastor Steve has as well. But if we go to a third vote, and one of us wins by one half of one percent, it doesn't matter which of us it is—it's hard to see how that makes us a united body... We exist as a convention of churches because we believe that we can do more together than we can do apart. What keeps us from splitting into a thousand different directions is one thing: our unity in the gospel of Jesus. We stand together because God saved us, and we want to see him save others—whether that's in our neighborhoods or on the other side of the world."

Essentially these candidates came to this decision because unity in Christ my friends was worth more than winning the ballot. Unity was more important for the sake of the gospel moving forward. The Lord's Supper was a time for the

church family to come together as one. Paul says that they were not eating the Lord's Supper because there was no fellowship amongst them. The Lord's Supper was a time for the church family to come together.

Now, I want you to imagine yourself as a moderately well-off ancient Corinthian of some means. Now if you are a typical Corinthian what you were use to before you became a Christian was going to public feasts or parties at the local temple. This is what you would think of when you thought of a public meal, a religious ceremony or feast but now as a Christian, the only religious feast that you would attend is the Lord's Supper, which has very little to do with indulgence and decadence. So some higher-class church members of a higher class would approach communion this way, not from Paul's perspective where he understood that communion predecessor was the Hebrew Passover meal, which was a holy meal, but it was also a meager meal. It was intended to be eaten, remembering the exodus, as though you were eating fast, so you can get out before judgment comes.

My friends, you can tell me if I am right or wrong here, but isn't it at dinner time when families kind of regroup after a long day, whether you had a good day or a bad day, whether you had a lousy day or a joyful day, whatever day it is we come together as a family and we share reports with one another. Sometimes, there is an element of disciplining that takes place at the table as well. The Lord's Supper and the Passover meal are both family meals, where God's people get together and remember the redeeming acts by which God has adopted his sons and his daughters into his family, into his household, right there present at the table eating directly from his hands. Communion my friends is a call to sacrificial unity. It is not just a time for you to cross your hands and have a time of individual reflection. It is not simply a call for you and me to privately confess our sins before a Holy God and to think about what we've done wrong this past week. It is not just about that. Although Paul did say in verse 28

28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Paul is not talking about the body on the table representing Jesus's broken body and shed blood. Paul is talking about the body at the table, meaning you and me. It is a 'we' concept not a 'me' concept. That's what Paul is talking about here. By neglecting this body, Paul says that we are eating and drinking judgment onto ourselves that's what it means. My friends by all means we ought to examine ourselves personally before we partake of the Lord's table. Our life, our thoughts, where we are spiritually by all means on your next Lord's Supper,

you ought to do that and take encouragement knowing that Christ sacrifice was to wash you clean of your rebellious record before a holy God, but as much and even more examine your relationships with one another.

33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

The original meaning here means to do more than just wait, it means to embrace people, it means to wait, it means to receive one another.

34 Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

Paul never denied them their personal rights, neither their personal property. Christianity does not deprive you of your personal liberty. It does not deprive you of your customs, your culture or traditions. Now of course provided they are honorable, but when we gather together as Christ body, we don't make those things the centerpiece put intended on the table. We don't do that. We put them aside and in perspective and if necessary, we leave those traditions at home, but we don't have to deny them. Why do I say this? Well, look at Psalm 113:7-8

7 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; 8 he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.

My friends those who are marginalized amongst us, those who are prosperous amongst us, my friends no matter who you are, we all come together, and we eat of the same table. That's what we do. There are no distinctions here as brothers and sisters.

In a plane no matter in which class you are sitting on a plane, everyone has their own personal section on the plane. So you get the first-class option where you get those really wide comfy seats with extra recline, a bigger screen, a better smell and a wider option of meals. Then you have economy class. In economy class you get those crying babies, you get those people sitting next to you that take off their shoes and then they proceed to take off their socks. So this happens in economy class, but if Paul told us to hold a worship service on the plane midflight. Will the first-class believers stick to their corner, enjoying their first class amenities while the rest of the people looked on. Will the service be divided to just first class members and the economy class members would kind of do their part? No my friends, we are called to remember each other in the context of Christian community, in the context of ministry, in the context of

service, that's what we are supposed to do. We are not told that there will be different sections on a plane with different prices but we are told to put those things aside and remember one another and their needs and in embrace each other across social class distinctions that the world makes, not what the church makes and so in examining ourselves corporately we must identify who we are forgetting. When we examine ourselves not personally, corporately we must identify who we are forgetting.

Leonardo Da Vinci was a great artist and at the age of 42 the Duke of Milan said to Leonardo these words, "I want you to paint for me a portrait of the Last Supper" and Leonardo painted that marvelous portrait of the Last Supper and when he had finished he felt that it was a masterpiece and he was grateful for it and he asked a friend, hey I would like for you to look at this painting and I would like you to give me your honest evaluation. The friend looked at it for a while and then he kept looking at it and he said, "its magnificent. I believe the most magnificent part of the painting is the cup, I can't take my eyes from it, its incredibly captivating". When he said those words, Leonardo quickly grabbed his paintbrush and he drew across it and this is what he said, "nothing in this picture will detract from the face of my savior".

Think about it my friends, it is not the cup, it is not the bread, we need to look pass the symbol to the savior. In a community like this, hopefully centered around the gospel which declares that we are all in desperate need for salvation and that we all receive salvation the same way, not by worldly standards but by grace through faith, such distinctions are not only irrelevant but they are totally inappropriate. Don't have any distinctions among people in the church because it is irrelevant.

THE LORD'S SUPPER IS THE ULTIMATE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' - *V.26*

Memorials are very important part of every culture. They allow people to remember a lost loved one or an important public figure. Memorials have existed in every culture for over a thousand years and according to psychologist, memorials help survivors of a particular tragedy to come out of that emotional shock in a fruitful manner. Dealing with death, dealing with lost, dealing with grief can be difficult for any person, a memorial made in honor of some person also serves as an everlasting tribute to a life well lived and a life worth remembering. It is a representation of how that person lived. It is like a final gift. Now, why do we memorialize people. Well, number one, to empathize with the

families of the lost loved one. Number two, to always be reminded that the ones who died and never forget. Number three, never forget the people who gave off themselves sacrificially to save others.

I want to share with you something that happened in my country about two months ago. One of the deadliest terrorist attack hit Sri Lanka. It was one of the scariest days for us as we were not sure about where the next bomb would go off. The Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka happened on the 21st of April this year, at around 8:45 am at least 15 minutes after every Easter service started in Colombo. So people were already in their seats listening to the preacher. Three churches in Sri Lanka and three luxury hotels in Colombo were targeted in a series of coordinated terrorist suicide bombings. 258 people were killed, over 500 people were left injured. The family of one victim who died in the bomb blast says that, his actions actually helped to save many lives. His name was Ramesh Raju and he actually stopped the man with a large backpack from entering his church which was the Zion Church in Batticaloa. People say that if the attacker had gotten inside the church and detonated the bomb inside the church, it's very likely that everyone would have died, but unfortunately because he was stopped at the door, he detonated himself just outside the entrance and the Sunday School class had been dismissed and all the children died in the lawn, 26 children died on that day. I don't say coincidentally as we believe in God's plan but the Sunday School lesson for that day was which one of you in this class would be willing to die for your Lord and no one knew what was going to happen 15 minutes after that.

Nothing will ever bring back Ramesh, but his heroic actions which spared pain for so many other families will at least in some way comfort his wife, knowing that his bravery and love for others, putting other people before himself, giving his life sacrificially. Unimageable pain and loss is being experienced just like that family by countless families across Sri Lanka even now, the pain is fresh, it is like a wound.

Friends, do you know the difference between a memorial to what the world describes a memorial and how the Bible describes what a memorial is. You know, in biblical Hebrew which is what the Old Testament was written in, there are roughly four thousand words in the Hebrew language compared to the four hundred thousand words in the English language and because of the relatively smaller vocabulary in Hebrew some Hebrew words carry multiple meanings and a range of ideas, one of those for instance is when the Bible says, God remembered. So for an example, in Psalm 105:42

For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham.

The word for remember is 'zakar'. Zakar yes means to remember but it also means to act on behalf of the person you are remembering. So the bible's idea of a memorial always includes acting on behalf of the person that you are remembering. Remembering is always followed by a call to action. It is very important to understand that the Sri Lankan terrorist attacks that happened two months ago and the 9/11 attacks that happened 18 years ago is just an outward symbol. It is just a symptom of a larger problem of an underlying disunity and alienation that exist between person to person and people of different races, different ethnicities and different religions.

My friends, the gospel is the solution to all this disunity. Jesus Christ is the answer my friends. Being in him, Christ dissolves discord and disunity. In Ephesians Paul reminds his gentile leaders that at the cross Jesus made in his flesh one new man out of Jew and Gentiles, by abolishing the dividing wall of the law, while at the cross is where hostility between God and man ceases. Paul goes onto say that it also puts to death hostility between man and man or person and person who are part of the body that's what it does. Christ kingdom brings belonging, Christ kingdom brings communion, Christ kingdom brings common purpose, Christ kingdom brings familial bonds. That's what it does. That's the beauty of the Lord's Supper my friends. It is not just to stand and eat of the bread and drink of the grape juice, it is to spend time remembering Jesus finished work on the cross, but it is more than that. It is a call to be a witness to the gospel. If you have genuinely being transformed by the gospel, you cannot keep it to yourself. You will desire that for the person next to you. That's what the Lord's Supper is about. It is a witness for the gospel. It is a call to go out.

In closing, there is an amazing story of a statue of a lamb that stands in a courtyard of a little church in Germany and a group of men were working on the church's roof when unfortunately one of the workers tripped and fell to the ground. The other men quickly climbed down the ladder to get to their colleague who they thought was severely injured or died. When they got to him, they actually were pleased to know that he was obviously shaken but he was uninjured. You see my friends, there was a lamb grazing next to the church and so when he fell instead of hitting the floor he fell on the lamb. Unfortunately for the lamb it was crushed, grateful for the lamb's intervention the man had a statue of a lamb erected in the place where he fell and on the plaque underneath it read, 'memorial to the crushed lamb'.

In essence, this is what the Lord's Supper is about. It is a memorial to the crushed lamb and to remember how he was crushed for our sins, so that we can live with him for eternity. That's the memorial, that's the call to action. My

friends, Jesus consumed the meal of God's wrath which was intended for indulgent, selfish and individualistic human beings like the Corinthians then and like people like us today. Jesus ate the meal of God's wrath so that we could eat the meal of God's forgiveness. So the meal itself reminds us of Him who remembered us, who did not neglect us, who though we were poor and He was rich He became poor to meet our need of forgiveness through his finished work on the cross.

Now examine yourself so that you are not neglectful of your brothers and sisters in this room and in your community.