

What makes the Lord's Supper so special?

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Research found that approximately 56% of information that we receive is forgotten after one hour, 66% after one day, and 75% after six days.¹ Our tendency is to forget more than we remember.

We see this struggle with forgetfulness in scripture as well. Throughout scripture we are encouraged to remember and not forget.

Isaiah 46:9 instructs to, ***“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other.”***

1 Chronicles 16:15 exhorts the people to, ***“Remember God’s covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.”***

In Deuteronomy 6:12 we read, ***“Take care lest you forget the Lord.”***

Psalms 103:2 declares, ***“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”***

Remembering who God is and what He has done is essential as we grow in our faith. So much so that even the Holy Spirit helps us. In John 14:26, Jesus told His disciples, ***“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”***

We must intentionally work to remember. To keep God and His truths on the forefront of our minds we are to think on His Word and come into His presence in prayer (Psalm 143:5). If not, we fall prey to the perspectives and desires of the world. As we read in Psalm 73, Asaph recounted how ***“my feet had almost stumbled, and my steps had nearly slipped”*** when he saw how the wicked prosper. He felt that his efforts to keep his hands clean and his conscience clear had been in vain. His soul became embittered towards God. Asaph had “forgotten” the truths of God. But then, in verse 17, it says, ***“Until I went into the sanctuary of God.”*** It was there that he remembered, and his perspective was reclaimed by the truth of God. He remembered the eternal end of the wicked and the eternal end of those who are with God.

Still seeing the unfairness of the world, Asaph was now able to say, ***“²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that***

¹ Murre JMJ, Dros J. Replication and analysis of Ebbinghaus’ forgetting curve. Chialvo DR, ed. *PLoS ONE*. 2015;10(7):e0120644.

I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

This is the role of the Lord’s Supper in our lives. To call us back into the presence of God’s truth. To help us remember what we have and who we are in Christ.

Christ did not just give us a spoken reminder, it is a multi-sensory event that takes us back to the first Lord’s Supper and all of its meaning. It is amazing that the God who created us, the God who knows completely how we function, passed on to us a reminder that includes our taste and our touch, our vision and our smell, and even our hearing so that the memories would be encoded in multiple areas of the brain. In this way it would allow us to recall and remember the details and all that they represent, to even a greater extent. ²

In the words of D.A. Carson, *“In some ways it is a shocking thing that we should have to be given a repetitive rite to call us to remember Jesus and his death on our behalf. But, in fact, we can become so engrossed in administration, praise choruses, expositions of the Psalms, seminars on marriage and on how to rear your children, and countless more good things, that Jesus’ death and resurrection become the presupposition of our faith, and no longer its center. So in his incalculable wisdom, Jesus bequeathed a rite, a rite to be repeated, one of whose functions is to call us back to basics.”* ³

It is this proclamation of Jesus’ death, through the Lord’s Supper, that we are to **“proclaim, alongside countless other Christian brothers of sisters, from every tribe and tongue . . . until He comes”** (1 Corinthians 11:26).

1) Observing the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-32, the Apostle Paul describes it with these words:

²³ 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, 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 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.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

The Lord Jesus Christ passed down two ordinances to the church that were to be observed until He returned. The first, baptism, was seen at the beginning of Christ’s ministry. The second church ordinance is the Lord’s Supper that came at the end of Christ’s earthly ministry. To get a fuller understanding of the Lord’s Supper we have to go back to the earlier parts of the Bible.

Matthew 26:26 states that, **“while they were eating”** the Lord’s Supper occurred. The Lord’s Supper consisted of the bread and the wine, but on that evening it was part of a larger special dinner, the Passover Meal.

² https://modules.sanfordinspire.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Creating_multi_sensory_experiences_bundle.pdf

³ The SBJT Forum: The Lord’s Supper.

Exodus 12 tells us the origin of the Passover Meal. The Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, had been slaves in Egypt for generations. Moses, speaking for God, commanded Pharaoh, the Egyptian leader, to release God's people, but Pharaoh refused time and time again. God brought plagues against the Egyptians and against their false gods, but Pharaoh refused to obey and let the Hebrews go free. As the final judgment, God brought a plague of death that killed every first-born son in Egypt. On the night when death came over Egypt, God instructed the Hebrews to put the blood of a male lamb which had no imperfections and no broken bones, over the doorframes of their homes. By this blood of an innocent lamb, they were protected and the death "*passed over*" their homes. A lamb was sacrificed to save the lives of the firstborn sons of God's people.

Because of this event, the Jews were instructed to observe Passover each year to remember what God had done for them. In Exodus 12 the Jews were commanded to, "*Obey these instructions (of the Passover Meal) as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.*" It was to be a way of passing down, to generations to come, a testimony to the greatness of their God. It was an annual meal that spoke of God's deliverance from the past, but also God's ultimate deliverance in the future.

It was during a sacred Passover Meal, on this reverent night of the year, that the Last Supper occurred. It was a simple upper room, a group of ordinary men, in a small country, but it would change the world forever. The Messiah, the Christ, the Deliverer had finally come, but not just for the Jews. He had come for people of every nation. They would observe the Passover Meal as had been done thousands of times before, but this time would be different. It was no longer to celebrate the past and the future. It would now be a statement about the present. The Christ Himself would participate in the meal and fulfill the messianic prophecies this very night. Jesus was the Passover lamb, come to take away the sins of the world.

As we join in the Lord's Supper, we are not sitting in this room alone. We are sitting side-by-side with Christian brothers and sisters who are also remembering the body and the blood of Christ. We are gathered together in this place bound not by where we are from or what language we speak, but united in the fact that we have the same Father. That makes us family.

This eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper table is not only for our individual benefit. There is also a corporate blessing to it as well. Sitting at a table and eating with others always brings a sense of bonding with it. You share food. You share conversation. There is a sense of shared experience and camaraderie. Throughout scripture you also see this sense of fellowship as people ate together.

Because of this, there is no room at the table for division or problems amongst brothers and sisters when we observe the Lord's Supper. Paul speaks of this directly in 1 Corinthians 11:

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is writing to those in the church in Corinth in regard to how they had abused the Lord's Supper. In their day it seems to have been accompanied by a larger meal, or at least more than just a small portion of bread and juice like we do it. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, "²⁰ *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.* ²¹ *For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.*"

Some of the Corinthians were using the Lord's Supper event to selfishly fulfill their desires and thus cause division. They were not thinking of others. They were mocking the whole purpose of the event for their own sake. This should not be true amongst us. We should examine our hearts to see if we are observing the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner in keeping with the character of Christ.

The Lord's Supper is not for unbelievers. One cannot be reminded of a salvation that has never occurred in their life. It is an act of remembrance, but also devotion. As one is observing the Lord's Supper, they are renewing their commitment and re-declaring publicly that Christ is their Lord. With this in mind, when we observe the Lord's Supper, when we take the bread and juice in our hands and put it in our mouths, there should be no idol in our heart or stubborn rebellion in our minds. Not that we can know every flaw of our hearts, but to the extent that we are aware, are we submitting ourselves and those areas of struggle to the loving hands of God so that we can daily be transformed into the likeness of Christ?

Thinking of the words of Paul, may we first examine our walk with Christ for any sinful discrepancy in our faith or unconfessed sin. Is there anything that is keeping us from intimacy with Christ? Is there any undone act of obedience, or sinful attitude that has the upper hand at this time? May we specifically search our hearts to see if we are the source of any division between ourselves and another brother or sister in Christ. If so, may we confess this sin and commit to making it right. May we retain the awe in the sacrifice of Christ and not allow the Lord's Supper to become an empty ritual of habit. May we abstain from participating if we are not yet followers of Christ. These are all examples of how one might observe the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Or maybe there are hidden sins in our "spiritual blind spots" that we are not even aware of. With this in mind, please join with me as we read Psalm 139:23-24 as a prayer to God: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*"

Please now take a few moments of silence to confess any sin in your lives and commit to any actions that will be required to make it right with God and others.

2) Meaning of the bread and the Body of Christ

Though the Passover Meal had several different elements, Christ chose to use only two to be used for the Lord's Supper. The bread of the Passover Meal was seen as the "bread of affliction" which was eaten by the enslaved Jews back in Egypt. As one partook of the bread in the Passover Meal of Jesus' day, their minds were to be taken back to the suffering that was endured by the Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt, remembering the night God had delivered them. The "bread of affliction" and God's deliverance come together in Christ. He is our Bread of life, whose body was broken for us so that we could be saved.

Isaiah the prophet wrote about it this way:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Isaiah 52:14 tells how ***“His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.”*** The sinless Son of God was willingly beaten beyond recognition. He allowed His body to be broken even though, as Matthew 26:53 declares, He could have, at any moment, called for twelve legions of angels (72,000 angels) who could have utterly destroyed all and delivered Him at any moment. But yet He held his tongue, endured the excruciating humiliation, taking the guilt of the world upon His shoulders.

Jesus is our Bread of Life. He is our daily bread. He is our manna from heaven. He is everything that we need.

In John 6 we see a story where Jesus feeds five thousand people with just five barley loaves and two fish. The people are so amazed that they continue to follow Jesus. But Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that they were following Him for the wrong reasons.

When they had received the food from Jesus, they could have chosen to bow before Him as Savior, Lord, and Messiah, but instead they thought to make Him king so He could liberate them from the Romans. Instead of basking in the presence of the Messiah, they saw an opportunity to use Him to get what they wanted. It was the selfish pattern of their lives. They were not true followers of Christ. They were followers of self. Jesus confronted them declaring Himself to be the Bread of Life. They were not to pursue Christ's gifts, but Christ Himself. We must guard our hearts against doing the same. As we eat this bread may we be reminded of the affliction, the deliverance, and the provision of our Savior, our Bread of Life, and may it drive us towards worship and away from selfishness.

In John 6, we find these verses:

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst . . . ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life . . . ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Jesus made a very disturbing statement. Eat my flesh and drink my blood. For our “civilized” ears this is at first offensive. Jesus is merely making a very simple analogy. If I am the bread of life, then

through faith take me in, ingest me, consume me, take all of me that you can, feast on me, rely on me to be your strength and your provision as your daily sustenance, as your source of life. We cannot just acknowledge Christ as Lord with our mouths or a loud “amen.” There is a point at which we must apply Him to our lives by fully putting our trust in Him.

In the words of Douglas Wilson: *“You cannot address your hunger by looking at pictures of food. You cannot hear music by staring at a page of notation. You cannot quench your thirst by thinking about the idea of water. No, in all such things you must come to the point of application.”*⁴

During the first Lord’s Supper, when Jesus passed around the bread to the apostles He said, **“This is my body. Do this in remembrance of me.”** Because of that phrase some believe that when the Lord’s Supper is observed, the bread literally turns into the body of Christ. When we look at scripture, we do not see that taught or even understood in that way by those early believers.

In the context of that first Lord’s Supper we see that Jesus’ was speaking figuratively, symbolically. In that Passover Meal, it was unleavened bread that they ate. For the apostles to then take Jesus’ words as literal would have been out of line with what Jesus said. The same would be incorrect for us as well. Jesus used symbolism often to communicate who He was. **“I am the Light of the world. I am the door. I am the True Vine.”** All of these had their spiritual application, but Jesus never meant that He was literally a light, a door or a vine. When he told his listeners that He was the Bread of life, it did not mean that He was actually bread. He was painting a picture in their mind as the true sustenance of man. But even in that He was referring to a spiritual sustenance.

As we come together to remember Christ in the Lord’s Supper, He will be here with us. Christ is in us and we are in Him. Where two or three are gathered in His name, there He is among them (Matthew 18:20). We will eat the bread to remember Him as our sustenance and His broken body that made it possible. His presence will be amongst us as the body of Christ. We, the church, are the temple of God, where He dwells. But the bread will be simple bread, a sacred object lesson, nothing more and nothing less, that brings us once again face to face with the gospel of Jesus Christ and the sacrifice that He gave so that we might be saved.

So, we will eat . . . and savor . . . and remember His broken body as He, who had no sin, took upon Himself the sin of the world so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The wages of sin is death, and through the broken body of Christ, He paid the death penalty for our sin, so that all who repent and believe will never die, but will live with Him forever.

3) Meaning of the juice and the Blood of Christ

The wine during the first Lord’s Supper was a symbol of Christ’s blood that was shed on the cross for us. Blood was chosen by God to be the symbol of life itself. In Leviticus 17:11, it says, **“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”** In Hebrews 9:22, we are told that **“without**

⁴ <http://exploringfortruth.blogspot.com.es/2012/08/lords-supper-devotion-remembering.html#.Wsvn8YhubIU>, read April 13, 2018.

the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.” That was the reason for the Passover lamb. Christ shed His blood so that we could be forgiven and gain eternal life. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament were rituals that pointed to the true sacrifice that was still to come in Christ. They were temporary in effect and had to be repeated over and over again. Sin against an infinite and holy God demanded an infinite and holy sacrifice. When Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, died, the full wrath of God was satisfied. Jesus Christ was truly the eternal *“Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world”* (John 1:29). Similar to the lamb’s blood at Passover, it was the shed blood of Christ that covered the guilt of man and protects man from the judgment of God. No other sacrifice will ever be required.

The blood of Christ did not only bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God, it brings daily blessing to our lives. It gives us power to overcome the evil one (Revelation 12:11). We can now come near to God (Ephesians 2:13). We are freed from a guilty conscience (Hebrews 10:22).

The Passover was the most important feast of the Jewish religious calendar. It reminded the Jews of Yahweh’s covenant to them through Abraham. It focused on the blessings that would be theirs as they obeyed the laws of God. The only problem was that throughout their history they never were able to walk rightly with God for an extended period of time. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel rebelled against God in pursuit of their own desires. The Old Covenant with God depended on following His laws, but it had proved impossible for them.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 looked forward to a New Covenant between God and Israel. God said, *“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

This is the New Covenant that Jesus spoke of during the Last Supper when He said, *“This is the New Covenant in my blood”* (Luke 22:20). Through faith in Christ we are born again. Our sins are forgiven, and we are given a new heart that enables us to walk faithfully with God. Salvation by grace through faith is not only the doorway to salvation, it empowers every believer to daily live the Christian life.

It is the blood of Christ that pays for our sin, reconciling us to God.

4) The importance of the empty Cross and Christ’s Resurrection

In Luke’s second writing, the Acts of the Apostles, he begins with the ascension and continues with the story of the followers of Jesus in the early church. In the book of Acts, the primary responsibility of the Apostles was to be witnesses of what they had seen. Because of this, Jesus gave them *“many proofs appearing to them for 40 days”* after his resurrection. Jesus then sent them out *“to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the world.”* They were not sent out to establish a new systematic theology. They were not scholars or philosophers. They were common men who were supposed to tell what they had seen and explain what it meant. They had seen Jesus do many things, but their primary testimony was to that of His resurrection. This was one primary factor when the disciples looked for a replacement for Judas in Acts 1:21-22; it had to be one who had been with them since the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. He had to join them in their task of being eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, ministry, death and resurrection.

They would testify to Jesus' coming to earth, to his sinlessness, to His miracles, to His being the Son of God, to His dying for the sins of man, but all of these would be proven by Christ's resurrection.

As we look to the writings of the early church, the resurrection of Christ is the proof that all other claims about Christ are true. Romans 1:4 tells us how Jesus was declared to be the Son of God . . . by His resurrection from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul notes that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are the issues of **"first importance"** in the faith.

Jesus was alive! It did not happen in secret where there would be no witnesses. The Apostle Paul writes in Acts 15:3-6: **"He (Jesus) appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive."**

Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah, the King, the Christ, and it all hinges on the fact that he was raised from the dead. Throughout the book of Acts, the Apostles defend themselves before the Sanhedrin, the priests, the government officials, to non-believers, by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to which they were eyewitnesses (Acts 4:10-11). Even their sermons focused on Jesus and His resurrection. It was the key. We see this in Acts 2, 3, 4 and 5. Others in the past had been hailed as great teachers. Some had proclaimed themselves the promised messiah. Thousands had been crucified by the Romans. But none had ever been raised from the dead.

The death of Jesus was essential because it paid the price for our sin, but crucifixion itself would not have been out of the ordinary for Jesus' day. Tens of thousands were crucified by the Romans. 6,000 were crucified in one day along the Appian Way in 71 BCE, after the rebellion sparked by Spartacus. Yes, crucifixion was savage and barbaric, but it alone did not bear testimony that sin had been forgiven and that death had been conquered. It was only through the resurrection of Christ that we know that penalty for sin had been paid in full and that death had been conquered. Romans 6:9 says, **"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."**

It is similar to the story in Mark 2:6-12. In this story Jesus is teaching in a home in Capernaum. The house is so filled with people that no one else can enter. Outside the house stand four men who have brought their paralytic friend to see Jesus. Because of the crowd they cannot approach Jesus. They then decide to climb up on the roof, dig a hole and lower their friend through the roof down to Jesus. In response Jesus forgives the paralytic.

At the same time, there were teachers of the law sitting in the room watching. At this point they began to question in their hearts, **"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**⁸ **And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?"**⁹ **Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?'**¹⁰ **But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—**¹¹ **"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."**

The resurrection is much the same. The unseen spiritual truth was proven by the visible physical evidence. Jesus had paid the price for our sins, but how could we truly know that our sins had been forgiven and that death no longer had power over believers? The answer . . . Christ's

resurrection. Because of this, the Gospel was preached focusing on Jesus Christ and his death, burial and resurrection.

In John 11:25-26, Jesus said, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”***

Our confidence is in that fact that our heavenly Father who raised Jesus from the dead is able to raise us from the dead. Christ’s resurrection has proven his dominion over death and sin and promised salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the answer to man’s greatest need. We no longer have to be afraid. Many make promises in our world, but then cannot keep them. We can stand in full confidence that our God, who has now resurrected Christ and who has seated Him at the right hand of the throne of God, will keep His promise and resurrect all who belong to Him.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”
(Romans 8:11)

“God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.” (1 Corinthians 6:14)

This resurrection power is not only for salvation, it is also our hope as we live the Christian life. May God give us understanding to know, ***“What is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places”*** (Ephesians 1:17-21).

We have now passed through four points of the Lord’s Supper. We have prepared our hearts. We have eaten the bread. We have drunk the juice. We have focused our minds on the risen Christ. As we close today, may we be humbled by the price that was paid and go forth celebrating the eternal life that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Discussion questions:

- 1.** What did you find most interesting in this sermon today?
- 2.** Why do you think we forget the truths of God so easily when we face the challenges of life?
- 3.** What do you think are common ways that Christians observe the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner?
- 4.** How would you describe the purpose of the Lord’s Supper in your own words?
- 5.** What do you think you need to remember from this sermon?
- 6.** What do you think God wants you to do in response to this sermon?
- 7.** How can we pray for you?