

Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

- Series: God's Church - Do This in Remembrance of Me
- Location: St Bart's Toowoomba 7.30AM; 9.30AM; 6PM [IN-PERSON; Online]
- Big Idea: Eat the Lord's Supper Together as one as a proclamation of the Gospel together
- Structure:
 1. A Divided Church
 2. A Unifying Meal
 3. A Serious Matter

- This morning/evening as you came into church hopefully, you checked in using the QR code and someone may have checked that for you.
- Now just imagine that instead of asking for proof of check-in, we asked you for your income summary from the last financial year?
- Then, if you had a good healthy income we would usher you right up the front, even into the platform up here with me.
- But if your income was low, you would be ushered right into the back rows
- Then when it came to the Lord's Supper, we would all have a big party up here with our large incomes, but then everyone else would be hungry.
- It seems ridiculous doesn't it? Coming to church to meet together; to celebrate our Lord's death and resurrection together; but only to be divided among the "haves" and the "have-nots"
- Well, this is exactly what the Corinthians were doing in the first century church...and this is the problem that Paul is addressing in these verses.
- This was a divided church, wrongly celebrating a unifying meal, which is a serious matter.
- So this is where we are headed:
 1. A Divided Church
 2. A Unifying Meal
 3. A Serious Matter

A DIVIDED CHURCH

- Now if you glance up at chapter 11 verse 2 - Paul says that he praises the Corinthians for checking in with him, for holding onto the traditions that he gave to them.
- He's beginning a new section in the letter looking at what the church should do when they gather together. This section is about how to worship in an orderly fashion.
- But the praise for the Corinthians ends right here in Verse 17.
- "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it."

- When the Corinthians were coming together to take the Lord's Supper, they were doing more harm than good!
 - Why? Because the church was divided.
 - Now we've already heard from Chapters 1-2 that the church was divided down the lines of leaders.
People were following Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.
 - But Paul refers to a different division here in this chapter.
He's referring to the divisions between the rich and the poor.
 - Those who have wealth and those who have nothing.
 - Those who society mark as successful and those who society mark out as unsuccessful .
 - Those who were the 'haves' and those who were the 'have nots'.
 - Their gatherings were harmful rather than good.
 - What exactly were they doing that has gotten Paul so worked up?
- What was happening was a common event in Corinth where people would gather together, bring their own food, eat together, but also be separated.
 - Those who were wealthy and in the upper class were brought into the inner room - the triclinium.
 - Those who were not so ate in the outer areas of the house.
 - But what was happening with the Corinthians is that the "well to do" followers brought a banquet. They devoured, and gorged on their food and even got drunk - right in the presence of those who weren't as well to do, who went hungry
 - The "have-nots" could only arrive famished and watch on as the "haves" got merry. This was Humiliating.
- This is far from the Lord's Supper. This is far from Jesus' prayer in John 17 where he prays that the church of God would be one!
 - But this is what was happening in Corinth and what is making Paul so - rightly - worked up
 - V21. "For 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. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?"
 - The Corinthians acted selfishly. All while attempting to celebrate the meal of the one who acted totally unselfishly.
 - This was a divided church. A proud church. A church that was off the rails! But a church that is worth paying attention to.
- When we gather together we come as people from all walks of life.
 - We all have different backgrounds, different stories, different abilities, and yes - different incomes.
We aren't called to be uniform! We don't have to be the same. But we are called to be united.

- Because if we are divided, if we hold grudges, if we gossip, if we avoid certain people - whilst coming together to celebrate our Lord's grace and mercy to us....we bring shame on the very thing that brought us together.
- We mock the cross if we shame other members of Christ's body
- Because the gospel is what unites us; and the gospel is what we celebrate and proclaim in the Lord's Supper which is a unifying meal

UNIFYING MEAL

- This isn't a human-made meal, this is a God-Given meal. Paul isn't just making this up! But he passes on what Jesus gave to his disciples on the night he was betrayed.
- And the night that he was betrayed was the night of celebrating a passover meal.
- The meal where the Israelites celebrated their rescue and redemption of the firstborn sons, and their rescue from Egypt.
- Where they would recall and bring to mind their rescue, where they would identify themselves with the nation as a whole, where they remembered their benefits from God's saving work.
- But Jesus transformed the meal and makes it all about him.
- He took the role of the head of the household and takes bread and...
- V24 "and when he had given thanks, he broke it saying, this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me"
- Jesus' body was given on behalf of us
- His perfect, innocent, blameless self, given up for us! To take away our sin! His body was broken so we can be made whole!
- And the bread is a palpable reminder, signal, and pointer to the broken body of Christ on the cross.
- Every time we eat the bread we remind ourselves of the great and utter graciousness of our King who has brought us into a close friendship, a deep fellowship, a repaired relationship with him!
- We recall that by faith, we have died to sin with Christ. We partake and participate in his body.
- Then V25 - In the same way after supper he took the cup, saying, "This is cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me."
- Jesus' blood was poured out as he was crucified to seal the covenant; to make firm the promises; to assure us of our renewed relationship with him.
- This is a reference to the promise that God gave to his people whilst they were in exile, when all things seemed hopeless, when all the chips were down, when they were taken away into a foreign land; and their homes were smouldering ruins.
- God told them that he would make a new covenant; a new promise with them. That he will soften their hearts and give them the ability to love and serve him; that they will know him; that he will be their God and they will be his people
- And then Jeremiah 31:34 "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

- And in Jesus death and in the pouring out of his blood, all these promises get the big massive “tick”! The “yes”!
- They all come about and find their fulfilment in Jesus’ death.
- And so when we drink the wine - we are reminded that God remembers our sin no more. That we are his precious children. That we are a united people; a new people - called to be his for eternity.
- And we are once again strengthened and propelled out to live as disciples of him.
- This meal screams at us in big neon capital letters that God loves us and has served us in the Gospel!
- That God has come running to us and pursued us and died for us in Jesus Christ.
- That Jesus [as we’ll hear in the communion service each time] Jesus, by his death on the cross and rising to new life – “offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people”.
- And this meal is an amazing gift to us and we need it...not because the meal is magical or is somehow by which we are saved...
- But God has given us this meal to constantly remind us of the spiritual realities that we can’t see... and all the blessings that we have in Jesus!
- in his kindness, he has given us a meal to touch, see, and taste the Gospel!
- It’s like a mirror reflecting back at us all that we have in Christ!
- This is no ordinary meal...this is a unifying meal. We are all in need of grace, we are all saved by grace, we are made one by grace.
- So then, if we eat and drink whilst being a divided church - it is not the Lord’s Supper we eat. It is something completely different.
- And if we do this - if we eat and drink whilst the “haves” devour food and get drunk and the “have nots” go hungry - then we should watch out.
- Because this is a serious matter.

A SERIOUS MATTER

- Paul begins to wrap up his logic in V27 “So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”
- In the context of this passage, eating in an unworthy manner is referencing eating and drinking when the church is divided and fractured.
- How can one both celebrate the thing which unites people together whilst also being so ignorant of the needs of others? Paul says it’s an offence! It makes the person guilty!
- If the Corinthians keep heading down this path, they’ve completely missed the point of the Gospel!
- So then the solution? Examining ourselves. The word here means to test to determine genuineness.

- And so every week we come together and confess our sins together and we examine ourselves...
 - so every time we come to gather together, we should continually remember God's graciousness and goodness towards us and be refreshed by his word and by his meal.
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- The Lord's Supper is a serious matter. It's not a small thing.
 - We shouldn't take it casually.
 - But we should come in great confidence in God's love. Casting aside those things which may distract us -
 - taking a moment as we come to pause and reflect on what we are doing here as God's gathered church.
 - God's grace is far too amazing to be distracted by anything else.
 - God's grace is far too precious for us to then go on and hold grudges or be divided as his people.
 - God's grace is far too glorious for us to become overfamiliar with or for us to forget.
 - And so we do this and eat this meal in remembrance of him, and live for his Glory in this world.
 - As American hymn writer Fanny Crosby wrote in the 1870's

To God be the glory, great things he hath
done: so loved he the world that he gave us
his son, who yielded his life an atonement for
sin, and opened the lifegate that all may go
in.

Oh, perfect redemption, the purchase of
blood, to ev'ry believer the promise of God.
The vilest offender who truly believes, that
moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord
Let the earth hear his voice...
...and give him the glory, great things he has done.