

# The Lord's Supper

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Date: 21 November 2021

Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Brian and Angie, and thank you for the beautiful music we've enjoyed all this day. Some churches, you probably are aware, observe the Lord's Supper, and it's just something kind of tacked on at the very end, and I've never liked doing that.

I've always thought it's such an important occasion in the life of the church that the entire service should be about the Lord's Supper when we do come to observe it.

And so that's what we want to do this day. Our Catholic friends, they believe differently about the Lord's Supper than we do, obviously.

They believe it's a sacrament. By that, they believe it has saving significance when you take the elements into your body. In fact, they believe in the idea theologically. It's known as transubstantiation.

And by that, I mean they believe when you ingest the cup and you ingest the bread into your body, it becomes literally the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 03 ] And of course, we as Baptists, Evangelical Protestants, we don't believe that to be the case. But sometimes in our effort to combat that idea, to say that we disagree with that and think that's wrong, we overstep.

And I've heard a number of Baptists through the years make this statement, no, that's not right. These are just mere symbols. And I want to say to you that I object to the use of that term, that phrase, mere symbol, because while we say that in order to combat the idea that the Catholics tell us about transubstantiation, I think we undermine the significance of this service and the significance of these elements when we refer to them as just mere symbols.

Symbols, they are. No question about it. But they're not just mere symbols. They're symbols that Jesus himself chose and that the church has been practicing for 2,000 years and for good reasons. In fact, when we're able, I always liked when I pastored at Brushy Creek and Western Avenue, to have the elements uncovered so you could actually see bread and you could see the cup visible while I preached the message and as we partook of the supper.

Because I think these elements themselves give us visible reminders. And we need visible reminders, don't we? That's the way we hang pictures in our home. Because it takes us back when we see that picture to a time that something was meaningful and occurred in our lives and we want to remember that.

[ 2 : 44 ] We need to remember that. And so the cup and the bread, they give us symbols that help us to recall important things to which we hold as believers.

I want to mention three of those very, very quickly. First of all, the elements are a physical, visible reminder of the incarnation of our Lord.

And I just got to tell you, I think of all the miracles that God has ever performed, that stands at the very top of the list of those things that God has done since creation.

In the book of Colossians chapter 1 and verse 15, Paul is telling us about the preeminence of Jesus. And this is what he says. He is the image of the invisible God.

Now I want you to just for a moment allow that to sink in. Just consider every one of those words. He is the physical, visible image of the invisible God.

[ 3 : 44 ] What a great description he gives us of who Jesus is. And what that says to us is that God has stepped forth from heaven. Imagine that. Don't just say that quickly and pass on to the next thing.

Think about that for a moment. The one who framed the universe, the creator of everything you've ever seen, visible and invisible. He stepped forward from the pages of human history and he stepped down to earth and became a lowly human being just like each of us in this room.

John 1 says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And then John clarifies for us exactly what he means, who this Word is. He says, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we beheld his glory. And it was like the glory of God the Father. I want to say to you this morning, there was a point in human history where God revealed himself to man in a fashion that he had never revealed himself previously in all of human history.

He left the portals of heaven. And he assigned himself the role of being a human being. He was placed in Mary's womb and born, and we'll be celebrating that even beginning next week.

[ 5 : 00 ] He was born a tiny babe just like many of us have held in our arms. He was just as vulnerable as any of our babies were at the time of their birth.

He had a real address. Do you understand what I'm saying in that? If they'd had cameras in that day and time, if they'd had video equipment, they could have filmed that, and we could show it on this screen this morning because I want you to know this is not a literary story.

This is not a figment of someone's imagination. That baby was really and truly born. Mary took him in her arms and laid him in a manger.

She wrapped him in cloth. You could have heard the cries that baby first made. He had a real address when they moved back ultimately to Nazareth.

Just like my address is 9 Henson Place in Greer. He had a real address, a way of people identifying and saying, that's where Joseph and Mary and their children and Jesus live.

[ 6 : 04 ] He had friends with names just like all of us in this room. Listen, when he cut himself, he bled real, real blood. When they pricked his skin, it gave him pain just like all of us experience.

He knew what emotional pain was like, as all of us do in this room. He knew joy and hope and had dreams, just like every one of us here today.

And so in a few moments when you take that bread in your hand, you get ready to receive it. Even now, you might just look at that bread in your hand and be reminded Jesus really came as a flesh and blood human being.

Today, we celebrate the incarnation of our Lord. Secondly, these are visible reminders of what Christ did for us at the cross.

That's why I love when I'm sitting in an audience and not reading and worship, I love just to look at that bread and think about my Lord because I need to be reminded. You know, the death of Jesus, the crucifixion, is the centerpiece of the entire Christian message, right?

[ 7 : 14 ] In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says, the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus is of what? It is of first importance. Isn't it amazing, though, how we gather so often here and we get so involved in the institution of the church and the going zone of the church?

We just kind of push that to the back burner. It's pretty easy for us and all of our doing and going and talking and the things that we involve ourselves in in church life to forget that what is the centerpiece is the death and burial and resurrection of our Lord.

But I want to tell you, I cannot look at the bread and cannot look at the cup and be reminded immediately, this is about Jesus' death on the cross. Paul said this, In other words, this is our opportunity to be a testimony to people who have not yet embraced the gospel that we believe as believers, Jesus really came, lived, and died on the cross for us.

In Luke 22, 19, Jesus said, And he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, This is my body which is given for you. And then he took the cup.

This cup is the new covenant established by my blood. It is shed for you. But I got to tell you, there are a lot of times that we come together and we're talking about marriage, we're talking about citizenship, we're talking about being dads or mothers or good children, and we forget about the message of the cross.

[ 8 : 48 ] And so today when you look at this cup and you see this piece of bread that we're going to give in just a moment, I hope you will again hear the ringing of the hammer because we forget that, don't we? We forget how that Roman hammer struck those nails and they pierced the skin of our Lord, and he no doubt screamed out.

We forget about those nerve endings being set on edge. We forget about the agony that was etched in his face when they took that crown of thorns and they meshed it into his brow and the blood flowed down his face and into his mouth and onto his garments.

We forget about that sound of the crack of the whip when they scourged our Lord and they literally flayed his skin from his abdomen and his back.

So we need to hear the hammer ring. We need to, again, see that agony that was on his face, the cruelty of the cross that he suffered for our sins.

And then finally, the elements are a powerful reminder that my presence at this table, this is one of the things I like the best, is by his grace alone and not by anything I've done to merit my place here at this table.

[10:04] You realize today we're not being fed by the First Baptist Church of Pickens. This is not our meal. This is the Lord's table. This is his meal.

You're invited to his house to sit at his table and to eat the provisions he has provided. This coming Thursday, many of us will gather in homes.

My family is gathering in my home and already my children and my dad and my sister have asked, what can we bring? That's just a polite thing to say, isn't it?

Some of you I talked to. Some of you this morning before the service and you're gathering with your families today or you're gathering with your families in a few days and one is bringing this and one is bringing another. You know why we do that?

Because we don't want to feel like a moocher, right? We don't want someone to do everything. Somebody's probably doing the bulk of it, but we want to feel like we contributed something.

[10:59] We brought a dessert. We brought a vegetable. We made the dressing. We did this or we did that so we can eat joyfully at the table because we know, well, I had a hand in that.

I want to tell you something. When you come to this table, you come as a beggar. You come as a peasant. You come ill-prepared. You come ill-dressed.

When we gather in someone's home, we want to dress appropriately. Sometimes that's informal dress, but sometimes it's formal dress. But we want to be appropriate for the occasion. I want to tell you something. You come with filthy rags this morning.

You come like the homeless person on the street. You come as a beggar to the table of our Lord. I want to show you a beautiful passage. In fact, I didn't have them put it on the screen today because I want you to open your Bible and read it with me, if you will.

Now, go with me to 2 Kings. I want to show you a story that just illustrates this so beautifully. 2 Kings chapter 24. Find that very, very quickly.

[12:01] We're not going to take but just a moment. I just want to read it to you because it'll speak to you just reading this. 2 Kings 24 beginning in verse 8. Find that passage.

1 Kings 24 in verse 8. Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king. He reigned three months in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan. She was from Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight as his father had done.

Can I just pause and tell you? He had a string of ancestors leading up to this and almost all of them were wicked, wicked, wicked kings. Jesus practiced idolatry and led the people away from God.

Look at verse 10. Here's what happened as a result. At that time, the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, marched up to Jerusalem and the city came under siege. Then king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it.

[13:06] Jehoiachin, king of Judah, along with his mother, his servants, his commanders, and his officials, surrendered to the king of Babylon. They marched into the city. They destroyed the walls of the city.

They destroyed the temple. They ransacked the temple. They killed thousands of folk. So what does he do? He and all of his leadership team and his family, they surrender in order to spare their lives.

Notice what it says. The scripture says next. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. He also carried off from there all the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king's palace and they cut into pieces all the gold articles that Solomon, king of Israel, had made for the Lord's sanctuary just as God had predicted.

God had been telling them this was going to happen. Then he deported all Jerusalem and all the commanders and all the fighting men, 10,000 captives and all the craftsmen and metalsmiths except for the poorest people of the land, nobody remained.

Nebuchadnezzar deported Jehoiachin to Babylon. Also he took the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the leading men of the land into exile from Babylon.

[14:28] So what the Bible tells us is this king suddenly loses his kingdom. This is the one who has reigned where Solomon once reigned.

It was a great and mighty nation. Now they've fallen and he's taken captive. His family's taken captive. They're stripped of their royal garments. They're marched to the city of Babylon, to the nation of Babylon.

Now look at one last thing. Go with me to chapter 25 and the closing verses in verse 27 and following. Chapter 25, verse 27 and following.

On the 27th day of the 12th month of the 37th year of exile of Judah's king Jehoiachin. Look out for just a minute. He has been in prison 37 years.

From what we read in chapter 24 to what we read in chapter 25. 37 years. Five years ago, I was the pastor of Brushy Creek Baptist Church.

[15:32] Today, can I tell you something? They don't know me from Adam. Right? Imagine you were in prison 37 years. There's nobody who remembers you.

Not only that, but you've been stripped of your royal robes. There's no scepter in your hand. You're a broken, old, dying peasant.

Who's forgotten in a Babylonian prison cell. And look what we read. Evil Merodot, king of Babylon, in the year he became king, pardoned King Jehoiachin of Judah and released him from prison.

He spoke kindly to him and set his throne over the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes and he dined regularly in the presence of the king of Babylon for the rest of his life.

never saw that coming, did you? Unless you'd read that story before. Can I tell you something? Jehoiachin didn't see it coming either.

[16:47] He's a broken old man. He's just in all likelihood at the end of his life. He's ready to die.

He's adorned in prison clothing. No one would ever look at him and say that guy's ever been anything, anybody in his life. And evil Merodot, and we're not told why, evil Merodot comes to the throne.

He knows the history. He says, I want you to go get Jehoiachin. And I want you to take off those prison clothes and put on clothes that would be appropriate for him to dine with royalty.

And he leaves that station and he brings his family. And he comes into the presence of King evil Merodot, the most powerful man on the face of the earth. And he, on a regular basis, dines with him until the day he dies.

You know why he's there? Because of the grace and the mercy of King evil Merodot. We don't know why. He just, for whatever reason, shows him grace and mercy.

[18:00] But I want to tell you something. That's exactly why you're able to come and sit here today and partake of these elements. It's not because you attended Sunday school. It's not because you were such a good man or a good woman or a good husband or a good father, a good wife or a good mother.

It's not because you've paid your tithes since you became a member of the First Baptist Church of Pickens. It's because God looked at you, a sinner, in your filthy, unrighteous rags. And he said, you know what?

I'm going to show him grace and mercy. And he reached down and he saved you. And so know today that you're here as a pauper when you come to take these elements. Just thank God.

God, you know what? I'm here today because of your grace and because of your mercy in my life. Let's bow together in the time of prayer. And I'm not going to do the praying.

I'm going to ask you to do the praying. Here's what I'd like to ask you to do if you would. With every head bowed and every eye closed. And listen, I know that you're a congregation where a lot of you don't like to pray out loud.

[19:06] But I'm going to ask you to do this. Would you just accommodate me in this? You can use your smallest voice, your slightest whisper. But I'd like you to whisper your prayer out loud to the Lord for just about 30 seconds or so.

Thank God right now for loving us enough to leave heaven and become a man. Would you do that right now? Just whisper it in your lowest voice. Lord, thank you.

Would you right now thank Him for His willingness to suffer in your place and ask forgiveness of the sins you've committed that placed Him on the cross? And finally, would you in your lowest voice just whisper a prayer thanking Him for the grace that He's shown you?

Would you confess to Him, Lord, I don't deserve Your mercy and grace. I don't deserve to be Your child, to be a part of Your kingdom. Would you just pray a prayer like that for just a brief moment? Father, I pray You've heard our prayer.

We thank You that You left heaven and became a man. We thank You, Lord, that You suffered all the atrocities that came forth as a result of our sin.

[ 20 : 45 ] Lord, we thank You for Your grace and Your mercy. We know we don't deserve it, but we're grateful for it. And I pray out of gratitude we live holy lives for You.

It's our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.