Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ

Have you ever had that experience where someone asks you about something you have seen or done many times but you just can’t remember how it goes? This happens with things that become so familiar to us that we no longer switch on the brain and just go through the motions. Well, each month, apart from January, on the first Sunday of the month, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. So that is 11 times each year. And we read a *preparation* form the week before, we read some words of *instruction* immediately before the Supper, and then the same words are spoken during the Supper, twice, because we typically have two tables. So the What and the Why of the Lord’s Supper should be familiar to many of us. But as we just noted, with anything familiar, it is possible to switch off the mind and just go along with the flow. And not all of us will have seen the Lord’s Supper before or given it much thought. So today we have the opportunity to think about the Lord’s Supper from *the* place in Scripture where it is explored and explained – 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.

And we ought to hunger and thirst for the Supper. It is **a gift of Christ to nourish and sustain the faith of each member of His church**. So three points as we think about the Lord’s Supper as a gift of Christ, the **striking command**, the **substantial promise**, and the **symbolic reminder**.

1. So first of all, the **Striking Command**. And we see this at the end of **11:24**, which looks back to Jesus’ words: “*Do this in remembrance of me*.”
	1. And the surrounding words point us back to the occasion that we read about earlier in **Luke 22**. And I want you to imagine that you were a fly on the wall that evening. The Old Testament sacrament that the Lord’s Supper replaced was the Passover. It was a celebration of the night that the Lord delivered the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. So the Passover meal had been prepared and Jesus was sitting with His disciples at the table. And He said to them, “*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God*.” Wow! What an attention grabbing opening statement!
		1. Now, the Passover involved eating a lamb. But because Jesus was what the Passover Lamb pointed forward to, the new Supper would not be about lamb. Instead, Jesus took **bread**, gave thanks, and broke it, saying, “*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me*.” And He did similarly with a cup of wine: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me*.”
		2. And I am pretty sure that the disciples weren’t thinking, “Guys, quick, someone get out some papyrus and ink and write down what He is saying so that we have the proper words with which to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in the future.” What they were probably doing was a **stunned mullet impression** – mouth open, looking at each other in absolute bewilderment and confusion. And perhaps they were whispering to each other, “What is talking about?”
		3. And we can sympathize with them – Jesus was instituting a sacrament that was about an event *that had not yet happened* – His death and resurrection! It is no wonder that all this only made sense to them after that event! And only then would they have remembered these wonderful words and understood that they were the institution of the Lord’s Supper.
		4. And when they did, we can be sure that they marvelled again at the striking command of Jesus. No longer were they to eat lamb at home and put blood on the door; now they were to eat bread and drink wine together with the congregation.
			1. Boys and girls, when you open your school lunchboxes and see bread sandwiches in there, are you thrilled and excited? Not really, right? Bread is not really all that special is it? So Jesus took probably the commonest food of ordinary life; bread, and added to it wine, which is a symbol of celebration and feasting in the Bible, to help us call to mind what His body and blood accomplished.
		5. But the command of Jesus is striking also because the bread is **broken** and the wine is **poured** **out** as a symbol of the far-reaching and comprehensive forgiveness that is ours in Christ! All our sins are forgiven!
		6. And it is striking also because not only do we see the bread broken and the wine poured out, we are to **touch**, to taste, to chew, and to digest these signs and seals of Christ and all His blessings! It is the gospel for all our senses!
		7. And it is **striking** also that we no longer partake of this sacrament in our own homes, but when we are gathered together with the Lord’s people as the church of Christ.
		8. So this is a **striking** command in many ways.
	2. But let’s not forget that it is a **command**; this is not something optional for believers; we must celebrate the Lord’s Supper. And perhaps you young people and guests who have been here a while get a little bit tired of your parents and elders asking you if you are ready to publicly profess your faith or become a member yet. And while we do have to be careful not to put undue pressure on someone, one of the reasons that we ask you this is because Jesus *commanded* us to celebrate the Supper and He uses it to nourish the faith of His people. And we are eager that you enter into this joyful and blessed obedience!
2. Well, as we continue to think about the Supper as a gift of Christ to nourish and sustain the faith of each member of His church, we turn our attention, secondly, to the **substantial promise** of the Lord’s Supper. And we see this promise back in **10:16**, where we read, “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*”
	1. And to understand the **substantial promise** that is made here, we need to know something of the background to these words. Paul was combating a particular problem in the church of Corinth at that time. At the beginning of **chapter 8**, we see that the Christians of Corinth were attending pagan feasts and eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. And how they justified doing this is explained back in **8:4*ff***. As they reasoned it, because the idols being sacrificed to were not really Gods, there was no harm in joining in and eating the meat. But even though this was true in and of itself, Paul wanted the Corinthians to see that there were **two problems** with doing this:
		1. The first is that **recent converts**, who could not yet understand this technical, theological reasoning, and who may have come from a background of this sort of idol worship, might just join in even though they thought it was food *really* offered to idols. So out of concern for their new brothers and sisters, the Corinthians needed to be very careful with their freedoms.
		2. And then, in chapter 10:20, he explains the second problem with what they were doing – idolatry: He says that even though idols are nothing, “*What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons*.” And to be a participant is to join yourself to and receive from. So if they ate food offered to Zeus or Venus, or whichever idol-god it was, they were joining themselves to and receiving something from demons. So for this reason too, this was a practice that the Corinthians should have nothing to do with. **1 Corinthians 10:21** continues, “*You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.”* And then **1 Cor.10:31** says, *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*.”
			1. And this is very much a secondary application point here but I believe there is a parallel for us today with a place like **Hell Pizza**. I don’t know if this is still the case but I once took a look at their website and on the home page you had two options – you could click on ‘Sell your soul,’ which is what they call setting up an account, or you could click on ‘Descend into hell,’ which is how you make an order. And the website and stores are full of Satanic and hell imagery and language. The pizza flavours are the seven deadly sins! And one of the desserts is ‘Satan’s slider.’
			2. And to any who might say, “But it’s just a marketing gimmick. The pizza is not sacrificed to Satan,” if eating food offered to idols, which do not really exist, was participating with demons, then something so saturated in Satan, who *does* exist, is surely something we should have nothing to do with.
	2. Well, that’s a very secondary point. Our **main** **point** is the substantial promise of verse 16: “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*” So to partake of the Lord’s Supper in faith is to be *joined to* and *to benefit from* the person and work of the Lord Jesus. It is a relationship word that is about our union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit within us.
		1. In **John 6:56** Jesus said, “*Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him*.” When you eat bread and drink wine, it becomes a part of your being. And similarly, by the power of the Holy Spirit, when you partake of the Supper in faith, Christ becomes part of you – He enters into you and you into Him. Your union with Him deepens and grows.
		2. In **verse 57** Jesus said, “*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*.” Your ability to live for Christ and your experience of life with Christ is strengthened as you partake of His body and blood, by faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
		3. And in **verse 54** Jesus said, “*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life*, *and I will raise him up at the last day*.” Jesus Christ is eternal life. And if you have died before His return, He promises to raise you up to enjoy eternal life. And if you are still alive when He comes, He promises to transform your body into a heavenly body and receive you into eternal life.
	3. So the substantial promise contained in the Lord’s Supper is that we are a participant in the body and blood of Christ. And I hope you noticed two key phrases that I kept repeating throughout this section – “**by faith**” and “**by the Spirit**.”
		1. One of the errors of Romans Catholic theology is the belief that the bread and wine *physically* change into the body and blood of Jesus. And that means that anyone who partakes of the Mass partakes of the body and blood of Jesus.
		2. But that is not correct. As answer 76 says, To eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink His poured-out blood means “*to accept with a believing heart the entire suffering and death of Christ and by believing to receive the forgiveness of sins*.” **It is only those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour who partake of His body and blood**.
		3. And we do not partake of Christ by chewing and drinking the elements, but by the unseen work of the Holy Spirit who nourishes and strengthens us with the body and blood of Jesus.
3. But thirdly and lastly, as we continue to think about the Supper as a gift of Christ to nourish and sustain the faith of each member of His church, we turn our attention next to the Supper as a **Symbolic Reminder**. And our focus here is **1 Corinthians 11:26**: “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*.”
	1. Boys and girls, have you ever looked closely at your parents’ **wedding rings**? Often times they are just a plain gold band but they can be other metals and they can be more decorative. And perhaps you have been to a wedding and seen how at a certain point in the ceremony, the groom puts a wedding ring on the finger of his bride, and then the bride puts a wedding ring on the finger of her groom. And as they do this, each says to the other, “I give you this ring as a symbol of my constant faithfulness and abiding love.” Do you remember hearing that said? And after the ceremony, there is usually a wedding feast and then being together as husband and wife from that day on. Well, it will help us to think about the Lord’s Supper as a type of wedding ring that the Groom – the Lord Jesus – gave to His bride – the church. It is a symbol that reminds us of His constant faithfulness and abiding love.
		1. And we need this because unlike married couples who go straight to the wedding feast and life together, we have to wait for the Second Coming of Jesus to enjoy the wedding feast and our life together with Him in eternity. And until then, He is in heaven and we remain down here on earth.
			1. Back in the days of people like Captain James Cook and Abel Tasman, men would board a ship and sail away from their wives, sometimes for many months or even years at a time. And I have to say that it is hard to reconcile what those sailors did with their wedding vows! And there was no Skype or Facetime and the post was haphazard at best. So all that their wives had was a wedding ring to look at as a symbol of what their husbands had promised as they waited for them to return.
			2. And from our perspective, we have to wait a long time for the return of Jesus. And while we wait, we are surrounded by so much sadness and despair. And there are also our many sinful failings. We lie, we cheat, we steal, we lust, we covet, we blaspheme, and we fail to honour those in authority over us. We do not love the lord our God with *all* our heart, soul, mind and strength, and we do not love our neighbour *as we love ourselves*. And this can lead us to doubt if we truly are God’s children. And I am sure you know what I am talking about. Even the Apostle Paul experienced this and cried out, “*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?*”
		2. Well, our gracious and compassionate Saviour knows this and the Lord’s Supper is like a wedding ring that reminds us of His constant faithfulness and abiding love. Each time we eat and drink, He says to us, in effect, Do not doubt me; I died for the forgiveness of all your sins. I have made you a part of the church – my bride. And I will come again to take you to be with myself.

Brothers and Sisters, young people and boys and girls, the Lord’s Supper is a gift of Christ to nourish and sustain the faith of each member of His church. It is a *precious* gift. It is a *beautiful* gift. It is a *much-needed* gift. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Amen.