

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Essential Church The Jesus Meal

Introduction: Good Morning Church! We miss you dearly. Though we are separated by distance this morning we are so thankful that our bond is stronger and deeper than any distance or situation. Our's is a bond of the Holy Spirit, through the shed blood and broken body of Christ. We are the family of God, whether gathered or scattered.

(Do me a favor - before we get into this week's teaching send one member of your family or a roommate, or maybe i'm talking just to you - go get some bread, or crackers, and a little bit of juice or wine - just enough for each person. Because at the end of our service today - we're gonna take communion. Parents - I don't think there is anything in scripture that would forbid your children from taking communion, even if they don't understand - actually - I would say scripture would encourage us to disciple our children into this - So maybe this morning you can walk your kids through this - I'll leave it up to you) Back to our study*

A few weeks back we began a new series we're calling Essential Church. We did so because at this moment many of us are despairing and lamenting the loss of what the church had become in the west (our large gatherings, corporate worship, sunday school, etc). But we see this as an incredible opportunity for renewal. In times like these we need to ask ourselves questions like what is the church; and what is essential to the life of the Church? We believe that by doing this - the church can and will go through a necessary renewal process and come out the other side of this more vibrant and more fruitful. We are calling it essential church because we believe the way forward is actually to go backward, to the beginning of the church. We need to look at the early church and see what was essential to their life. And what we find in Acts 2:42-47 is that the church made a liturgy - a habit and practice of devoting themselves to the Apostles doctrine, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the

prayers. And throughout the ages this has been a constant liturgy of the church, whether gathered or scattered, though the manifestation of it may have taken different shapes or forms over the centuries.

By practicing this liturgy, and centering their lives on these essentials the early church was able to continually adapt, being both flexible and fruitful amidst the constant changes that they faced whether through growth dynamics, politics and persecution or the leading of the Spirit into new ventures. So we are spending these weeks looking at their liturgy - The things that they habitually observed and practiced together. Last week we looked at the Jesus way of Life - The early church had a common way among them - they all were seeking to live out the Jesus way of Life - sacrificially loving and serving one another - I summarized it by saying - The Jesus way of Life *Is a determination that when I spend time with someone they go away with a sense of being refreshed, loved, heard, and helped, as though they had been spending time with Jesus himself.*

If this servant posture of Jesus is a liturgy, a practice, and a habit of our community it will not only shape our hearts and desires, but it also prepares us for mission. As we practice this servant posture with other followers of Jesus, we will begin to practice it with those who are not Jesus followers, those who are outsiders. We will begin to see those outside the church as people to be loved and served, not ignored, judged or condemned..

This morning we want to look at the third essential element to the life of the early church - The Breaking of Bread or The Jesus Meal.

1. The Jesus Meal

- a. In Acts 2, Luke highlights the Breaking of Bread in his list of essential elements of the early church's life. The breaking of bread refers to the fact that the early church was a communal church, they gathered together often, even daily. We are told they ate their bread with generosity and simplicity, they shared meals together, they were like a family as we saw and talked about last week. But more importantly it wasn't that they were like a family but what this family centered around, or who this

family centered around - it was a Gospel family, a Gospel community. Luke calling this The Breaking of Bread is most definitely a reference to the Church's practice of remembering the Last meal that Jesus ate with his disciples on the night he was betrayed, the one we now call The Lord's Supper, Eucharist or Communion. Jesus told the Disciples to observe this meal - In remembrance of him.

- i. When the Church gathered the center of their attention was always the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for their sakes - God's reconciling, giving and forgiving love.
- b. The practice itself was most likely very different than the way we observe the Lord's supper today. Theirs was much more natural - first, it was a true meal, in a home, and in that meal the bread and the wine would be present and at some point and time, attention would be drawn to the fact that Jesus body was broken and his blood was shed for the forgiveness of sin, to inaugurate the new covenant. The bread was broken, passed and eaten, then the cup of wine would be passed and it would be drunk. The act of taking and eating the broken bread and drinking the cup of wine was done as a unifying act of trust in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus for our sin on the cross. The gathered community was saying, Jesus, you died so we can live. You died so that we could become partakers of the kingdom of God and members of God's family.

2. So what is this liturgical meal for; what is it meant to do for the church?

- a. The Lord's Supper helps the Church remain Christ centered... every week we are reminded, "This is my body, given for you; take, eat, and be grateful! This is my blood, shed for you and for all human beings for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me, etc."
 - i. But what does it mean to remember? Does it simply mean we shouldn't let thoughts slip out of our minds? Does it mean we reminisce on the sufferings of Jesus so we feel really thankful or really awful? For many

Christians, to remember is an ambiguous mental activity. But in the Bible, a call to remember—especially when tied to a covenant sign or ceremony—is a vibrant, powerful, and participatory concept where we recalibrate our lives according to what's being remembered.

- ii. By recalibrating our lives often by the Jesus meal we become a community centered around Jesus self sacrificial act which creates a dynamic of forgiveness and reconciliation.. The meal becomes a monument of the New Covenant.
 - iii. I've noticed that in churches where communion is not central to the gathering, other aspects of christianity take the place of what this meal is meant to do - People get baptized again and again, or continually go forward for an "altar call" to "get saved again", because they're looking for a recalibrating event or renewal ceremony - That's a huge part of what this meal is meant for - to recenter our lives around the sacrifice of Jesus for us and for the world - his reconciling, giving and forgiving love.
- b. This meal also helps the church remain Gospel centered in the most down to earth practical way. This meal reminds us of how desperately we need the Gospel - we need to be forgiven, rescued, and reconciled to God. It reminds us that the world and even our own lives are broken - we should expect people to mess up, to blow it, to sin, to hurt and disappoint us - but this meal simultaneously reminds me, reminds you - that Jesus paid for our sins and rebellion against God at the cross - he made reconciliation for us, and that he has brought us into a family of forgiveness - Where love covers a multitude of sin. Where mercy triumphs over judgment. Where sin abounds grace abounds much more.
- i. You can really see here how this is a liturgical act in the sense that we've been talking about it. Communion is something done by each of us, but it's not just about me,

and my sin, it's about US; it's about this family - God's family and us living as one reconciled holy body.

- c. In this family that centers around the sacrificial gift of Jesus - We forgive - we don't hold on to grudges or repay people - Jesus dealt with that at the cross. We make reconciliation - we don't just move on or move away - because Jesus made cosmic reconciliation at the cross. We put our own sin, failures and the sins and failures of others to Jesus' account. This liturgy reminds us that following Jesus means that we are people of the cross. Everything we do is to be shaped by the cross - we are to be a cruciform community.
- d. Of course it is in moments where we are truly hurt and sinned against by others that the work of Jesus cross can become so real to us - what do I mean? In forgiveness I have to die to my desire for vengeance, for justice, for self justification - I have to nail it to the cross. Doing this is not easy or small - it's a kind of death. And in this way we learn the way of Jesus, personally.
 - i. *"The only churches that will make any impact in this generation are those that astonish the world with a capacity for love, sacrifice, forgiveness that obviously transcends self-interest. Then it really does look like Jesus has come to town."* - Ray Ortlund Jr
- e. Does our forgiveness, sacrifice and generosity astonish the world? Does it call people to question or wonder at the church - what kind of love is this?
- f. I often hear people say - I am so glad to be a community that takes care of each other. But how powerful and earth shattering to say, "I am so glad to be part of a community that truly forgives one another; a community of reconciliation".

Closing prayer: Jesus, this morning we come to your table - where you have invited us to have a little meal with you - The table is set and everything has been provided by you. We have the bread that represents your body - broken for us. We have the cup of wine that represents your blood being shed for the

forgiveness of our sins and the New Covenant in which we stand. Lord, may this simple act of faith cleanse our hearts this morning, may we return to you fully knowing that you are full of grace and truth, and may we strive always to be a forgiving and reconciled family - Then send us out to proclaim your love, forgiveness and reconciliation to the bitter, unforgiving, and lost humanity.

Forgiven so that I can forgive - Be it unto me!

Amen - let's take the bread and cup together.