

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 10/6/'18) **THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER**

Introduction This morning we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This term for Communion comes from the Bible passage which we have just heard read, in verse 20. Here Paul doesn't use the noun *kurios*, meaning "Lord", but the related adjective *kuriakos*. It is legitimate to translate this as "of the Lord" or simply "Lord's", but it could also be translated "lordly". In the Roman Empire it often had the sense "imperial", and in the context of a monarchy it would be appropriate to translate it as "royal". So this Lord's Supper which we are going to celebrate is not trivial or perfunctory, not a mere Christian custom, of minor importance. It is a kingly celebration, which belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why Paul uses such strong language to condemn the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper - **read 1 Corinthians 11:17-20 and reflect on the force of this**. And this is why Paul goes on a little later to warn the Corinthians against lacking reverence and seriousness in their celebration of the Supper - **read 11:27-29**. This morning we need to come to the Lord's Table with due seriousness, with an appreciation of the privilege of participating in a lordly celebration, a royal meal. I believe that it will help us to do this if we reflect on the rich meaning of the Lord's Supper. So this is what I propose to do this morning, from three perspectives - the past, present and future perspectives.

The Past Perspective: In Remembrance The words "in remembrance" are used twice by Paul in his much-quoted statement about the Lord's Supper in **1 Corinthians 11:23-25**. And these words echo words used by Jesus himself at the Last Supper - **read Luke 22:19**. So when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are meant to remember the Last Supper, but even more the significance of the Last Supper. It spoke of what Jesus was then about to do; it spoke of his dying on the Cross for us. Therefore the Lord's Supper is never mere custom, because it reminds us of what Jesus did for us; it reminds us of his costly love; it reminds us of his sacrifice. But such remembering is about much more than memory, much more than recalling an event to our minds. We will understand this if we look at the way the word "remember" is used in the Old Testament. Consider first the way it is used in the fourth of the Ten Commandments - **read Exodus 20:8**. For Israel, "remembering" meant much more than noting each Saturday that this was the seventh day of their week; it meant acting in line with that remembrance. I could list numerous other Old Testament examples, but let's just look at one that might at first seem strange to us - **read Numbers 15:37**. If we were to stop here, we might think that we are looking at nothing more than a convention concerning dress. Indeed, Jesus criticised the Pharisees for wearing long tassels

merely to draw attention to their piety. But we see if we read on that this is not what the tassels were about – **read Numbers 15:38-41**. The Old Testament used the word “remember” to mean much more than a memory exercise. It was about remembering so as to live rightly as God’s people. So when we eat the Lord’s Supper and “remember” what our Lord has done for us, it is much more than a memory exercise. We are meant to remember the significance of what Jesus did, to think with deep gratitude of his love and our salvation. We are meant to commit ourselves anew to live lives of gratitude, lives of discipleship.

The Present Perspective: Fellowship The present perspective is particularly prominent in 1 Corinthians, both in Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven. In Chapter Ten Paul uses this perspective on the Supper to explain why the Corinthian Christians must not participate in idolatrous feasts. **Read 10:14-16, 18-22**. The language of “participation” here is based on the Greek word *koinonia*, and related words. “Participation” is a good functional translation in this context, but it misses the full force of the Greek word group, which comes out more clearly in the frequent translation of *koinonia* elsewhere as “fellowship”. The Lord’s Supper celebrates our fellowship with Jesus Christ, especially our taking his death and resurrection to ourselves as defining who we now are, people who have died to our old self-ruled lives and entered into new lives as obedient followers of our risen Lord. But I left out a verse – **read 10:17**. If we are in fellowship with Christ we are necessarily in fellowship with one another as Christians. This second dimension of fellowship, which is mentioned briefly in Chapter Ten, comes to the fore in Chapter Eleven. When Paul condemns their manner of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, it is precisely at this point that he sees them as having failed to honour Christ. **Read 11:20-22**. They were meant to be celebrating their oneness in Christ as they remembered his having died for all of them. But instead, it seems, the wealthy were eating and drinking to excess, while the poor were excluded and humiliated. Probably many of the poor were slaves, who were allowed to attend but not allowed to take food and drink from the master’s stores with them. This issue doesn’t arise in the same form for us today, but I believe that our Lord still wants us to be in right relationship with those alongside whom we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

Future Perspective: Until He Comes Both Jesus at the Last Supper and Paul in writing about the Lord’s Supper looked forward to a future which is still future for us. **Read Luke 22:14-18**. As Jesus presided over the Last Supper, he spoke of the time of fulfilment, of the day of the perfect Kingdom of God. This suggests that a joyful feast is an appropriate picture of what that great day will be like. When Christ returns as glorious and triumphant King, there will be the most wonderful celebration of all time,

and we will share in it if we have put our faith in Jesus the King. This perspective on the Lord's Supper is less prominent in 1 Corinthians, but it is clearly there - **read 11:26**. If we remember this verse, then every time we proclaim the Lord's death by sharing in the Lord's Supper, we should be conscious that this is something to be done "until he comes". What we experience now whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper is precious, but it is only like a rehearsal in comparison with the magnificent celebration which will occur when Jesus returns in triumph, and every knee bows to him.

Conclusion Let us join now around the Lord's Table. Let us look back, remembering that Christ died for us, and renewing our commitment to live as people for whom Christ died. Let us do this as an act of fellowship, fellowship with Christ and with Christ's people, determined to live in conformity with that double fellowship. And let us do it as an act of anticipation, rejoicing in the great day which it foreshadows, the day of Christ's return as triumphant King.