

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today is a day of feasting. We call the sacrament that we are going to participate in just in a few moments following the sermon, the Lord's Supper. And we do well to give it that name, but we could also call it the Lord's Feast. The Lord invites us to His banqueting table, and the Lord feeds us with spiritual food. Now, of course, it is so evidently true that a morsel of bread and a sip of wine are unlikely to provide physical satisfaction. They're not going to calm physical hunger or physical thirst, but they do represent a spiritual feast provided by God for us. And this feast serves a present purpose. What we will participate in today is an event that is needful and helpful for us today as believers. We will be fed today. Today we will receive nourishment that will provide strength for the here and now. But today's feast also serves as a symbol and reminder of a future feast, one that Jesus explicitly refers to as He institutes the sacrament. We've read the verses there in Matthew chapter 26, and particularly I would draw your attention to what Jesus says there in verse 29, I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. So, Jesus is instituting this sacrament that perhaps we might say primarily is intended to give His disciples the opportunity to look back to what He was about to do as He contemplates, of course, the sacrament being participated in in the years to come. And that is what we do, of course. We remember the Lord's death, something that happened in the past. But in these words, Jesus also encourages us to look forward, and to look forward to this occasion, to that day He clearly has in mind, in the language He uses, a very specific occasion when He will, in His own words, drink it anew, drink of this wine anew with His disciples, with you in my Father's kingdom. And this feast that Jesus looks forward to serves as one of the glimpses we are given of what it means to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And those of you who were able to be here last Sunday morning will remember that that was part of our text last Sunday. Just as a brief reminder for the benefit of all, and perhaps particularly for the help of those who weren't able to be here last Sunday. Last Sunday we were exploring something of God's love for us as it is described in words directed by Paul to the believers in Thessalonica.

And we were able to notice how Paul speaks of God's love as being from eternity to eternity, a love that in eternity past decided to save us, a love that provides for our salvation in the person of Jesus and a love that shares. And on that point in particular, taking the words of Paul, He called you that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you'll remember that we identified this as a future blessing to be enjoyed in the New Age, to be inaugurated with the coming of our Lord Jesus. Now, I readily confess that I did not have, and still don't have, an adequate understanding of what that means or what that involves to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus

Christ, but suggested that the Bible provides glimpses of what is involved in sharing in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this morning I want us to consider this future feast that Jesus refers to as one aspect of what is involved in sharing in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the text that will guide us in our thoughts is not Matthew chapter 26, but rather from that text, we will move to another passage in Matthew where Jesus speaks of, I would contend, this self-same feast. And I'd invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 8. Matthew chapter 8, and we'll read from verse 5 through to verse 13.

And as we read the passage, you'll recognize the language that Jesus uses that I'm identifying as being a reference to the same event, to the same feast that He speaks of at the institution of the Lord's Supper. And I hope you'll recognize the verse even as you remember what we were sharing with the children just a few moments ago. So, Matthew chapter 8, you'll find that on page 972, and we'll read from verse 5. When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him asking for help.

[6 : 12] Lord, He said, My servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. Jesus said to him, I will go and heal him. The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have You come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, Go, and he goes, and that one come, and he comes. I say to my servant, Do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, He was astonished and said to those following him, I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then Jesus said to the centurion, Go, it will be done just as you believed it would. And His servant was healed at that very hour.

Jesus, in these verses, speaks of a great feast and provides us with significant information concerning this great feast. Well, what can we learn about this feast? A feast that I would encourage you to encourage you to remember that we will be anticipating as we take part this morning in today's feast. Now, we can order the material that we find in the passage that we've read, and particularly verses 10 to 13, under the following headings. The time of the feast, the delights of the feast, the participants at the feast, and finally, the key to the feast, or the key that allows us to enter into the banqueting hall. The time of the feast, the delights of the feast, the participants at the feast, and the key to the feast. First of all, the time of the feast. When will this feast take place?

Now, Jesus presents the matter with great assurance. There will be a feast. I tell you the truth, or I say to you, that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast.

There's no doubt that the feast will take place. But when will it take place? Well, are we actually told the when of the feast? Well, while we're not told in detail, we might say, Jesus certainly points us in the right direction. He points us forward in time, and He does so in two ways. Firstly, and very simply, the description provided by Jesus is entirely of a future event. Many will come. Many will take their places. It is, very evidently and very clearly, a future event that Jesus is describing.

So, at that level alone, we are pointed in terms of the direction of when this feast will take place. But Jesus also identifies what we might call the location of the feast, for want of a better word, the location of the feast as the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven. Many will take their places, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Now, what does He mean by that? Well, He's certainly making clear that the feast will not be taking place on the earth as it was then and now constituted. But more than location, this is about a contrast between the present age and the coming age. Jesus, in speaking of the kingdom of heaven, is pointing forward to His return in glory when He will gather all His people to Himself. And when will that be? Well, we don't know when that will be.

[10 : 36] But we do know that it is in the future. It is certain the day has been appointed, but this is a future feast. Well, I think that much is clear. But before we move on to the second aspect of the feast that we want to consider, and remaining on the theme of the time of the feast, we should say that there is a day when the feast will begin. That day has been appointed. We don't know when that day is. We don't know the precise day, but we know that there is a day. Jesus said in Matthew, speaking to His disciples, speaks in those terms, on that day. The day when the feast will begin has been appointed. It is a day when the feast will begin, but there is not a day when the feast will end. Now, for the people that Jesus was speaking to, this subject of feasts was something they were familiar with, and we know something of that as we discover some of the cultural background of how people in Jesus' day celebrated great occasions, a wedding feast, for example. And we know, and we were told by those who have studied these matters, that often these feasts would go on for days, unlike perhaps what we are used to, a party, a reception, well, a few hours, and that's the end of the matter, but not so at the time when Jesus was ministering. And so when He spoke of a feast, people could imagine and envisage an occasion that might last several days. But however long the feast was, even if it was several days, everybody knew that it would come to an end. Eventually, the feast would end. There would be a final day, even if it hadn't been programmed when that day would be, but the wine would run out, the food would run out. People would have to carry on with their lives, and the feast would end. But not so with this great feast. There is a day when it will begin, but there is no day when it will end.

The time of the feast, but also we can consider and perhaps dwell a little more carefully on the delights of the feast, because this really is the heart of the matter. The whole point of a feast is that it is special. Plain fare that is good and necessary for an ordinary meal has no place at a feast. It is a feast after all. You can have your chicken nuggets for tea on a Tuesday night, and that's fine. But at a feast, you're looking for something special. Now, maybe some people are thinking, well, there's nothing more special than chicken nuggets, but, well, each to his own. I remember when I was a boy, not long ago, I used to spend an occasional weekend with a friend in Inverness, and one of the highlights of the weekend was a midnight feast. We lived in Dornach at that time, so, you know, just an hour or so down the road to Inverness. My mom or dad would give me a lift, and I'd be dropped off at my friend's house, and usually maybe on the Saturday we would get our supplies. We would go to the shop, and we would get the necessary supplies for a midnight feast, and the day would be all planned out, and the highlight was this midnight feast. Sometimes it wouldn't last till midnight. It was just so difficult to wait, but even though it wasn't at midnight, it was still a midnight feast in our mind, and I won't bore you with the details of what was on the menu, but an array of confectionery, really, and some other things as well would make up the feast, and, of course, that's the whole point of a feast. It is something special. Well, what about this feast that Jesus refers to and points forward to in the passage we've read in Matthew chapter 8? What will be the delights of the feast?

Well, interestingly, and very significantly, the primary focus is not on the menu. Now, it may be that this is because Jesus intends us to understand the feast and the language of a feast as symbolic and not a real feast in the sense of an actual physical feast with actual eating and drinking.

That's possible. I have no doubt that the feast imagery used by Jesus on this and on other occasions does have a symbolic purpose, but I don't think we need to choose between the feast as symbolic or as symbolizing great truths or the feast as a real feast with eating and drinking.

It can be both, and I would tentatively suggest or humbly suggest that it is indeed both. Jesus does, after all, in the passage in Matthew 26, speak of drinking again of this fruit of the vine. You know, very literal language of real wine, of actual wine that Jesus is employing as He speaks to the disciples on that occasion. But even if this feast is a real feast, and even if the fare and offer will be of the highest quality, the primary delights are not to be found on the banquet table. Rather, the greatest delights are to be found at or around the table. Our greatest delight will have to do with who is there rather than what we eat or drink. A feast was, in Jesus' day, first and foremost an occasion for fellowship and friendship. And this is certainly the case, and certainly will be true of the feast that

[16 : 50] Jesus describes. This will be the greatest delight, the fellowship to be enjoyed rather than the food to be consumed. Well, what fellowship? What fellowship will we enjoy at this feast that Jesus speaks on?

Well, primarily, and most wonderfully, fellowship with God. The feast takes place in the kingdom of heaven. The feast takes place in God's home. It is God who prepares the feast, it is God who invites us to the feast, and it is God who is present at the feast. Again, we're reminding ourselves of what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 26. Jesus speaks of being with you, being with you when I drink the fruit of the vine anew. Jesus will be with His disciples at the feast, and the language He used also implies the presence of His Father at the feast. In the parallel passage, that is the parallel passage to Matthew 26 that we have in Luke chapter 22. The language that is used is even more intimate. Jesus speaks in these terms, so that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom. Eat and drink at My table in My kingdom.

The greatest delight for the believer at God's feast is God Himself. Our Heavenly Father will be there, and our Savior will be there with us. At this feast, we will enjoy fellowship with God that is rich and intimate and unhindered or spoiled by even a trace of sin or guilt. This, then, is the greatest delight to be enjoyed at the feast, fellowship with God, but also fellowship with God's people.

Now, we'll say more on this when we consider the participants who will be at the feast. But suffice it to say that here our fellowship or the fellowship with God's people that we will delight in at the feast will, in the same manner that we described our fellowship with God, will be rich and intimate and unhindered or spoiled by even a trace of sin or guilt as we enjoy fellowship with one another, fellowship with God's people, with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and we could go on and enumerate so many others. So, the principal delight of God's feast for God's people is fellowship, fellowship with God and fellowship with God and His Son. Such fellowship will be the source and cause of our joy and bliss, joy and bliss that will be heavenly and eternal, the delights of the feast. Moving on to another matter that Jesus addresses in these words in our passage in Matthew chapter 8. And in some regards, you might say it's His principle, a concern on this occasion, and that is the participants at the feast. Who will be there? Now, Jesus assures those who are listening, and He assures us that many will come. There in verse 11, we remind ourselves what He says, I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast. Many will come. Well, using that word many as our starting point, we can develop or elucidate its meaning in three directions or in three ways. Who are the many?

What does many mean? Well, at the most obvious level, many means numerous. That's the primary meaning of many. There will be a lot of people at the feast. It's not a very deep reality that we're discovering. It's so clearly there in front of us. Many will be there. There will be a lot of people.

[21 : 04] We can adopt the language used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the numbers of those at the feast as a multitude that no man can number, more numerous than the stars in the night sky or the grains of sand on the seashore. It may appear to us sometimes that God's people are few in number, but that is far from being the reality. Jesus assures us that many will come. So, there will be numerous participants.

But another aspect of what Jesus is saying here, and of greater importance, it seems to me, in Jesus' estimation, certainly for His purposes on this occasion, is that the many will be diverse.

It will be a diverse gathering. The many will come, says Jesus, from the east and the west. Now, this simply means from all over the world, from all over the world. Similar language we find in in Luke chapter 13, where we have all four points of the compass identified in Matthew chapter 13, and in verse 29, we read, people will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. So, very, very similar language to what Jesus employs here, but even more clearly, identifying this diverse gathering as coming from all over the world.

Now, the significance of Jesus saying that the participants would come from all over the world would not have been lost on the audience who have just heard Jesus commend the centurion, a Gentile, a Gentile for his faith. See, the primary purpose in Jesus talking about the participants coming from all over the world wasn't so much that people would start to imagine this global gathering, though no doubt they could do that, but particularly to emphasize that at this feast, there would be not only Jews, but Gentiles. The centurion would be there. This Gentile centurion, he would be at the feast. He would be at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. This would be a diverse gathering. God's feast in God's kingdom will be a gloriously diverse gathering of Jews and Gentiles, of men and women, of rich and poor, or those who in this life have been rich or poor, of men and women from every tribe and every nation and every culture. Indeed, this feast will be the fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah chapter 25 that we read and that we don't have time to dwell on this morning. And in this reality that Jesus is presenting concerning the participants at the feast in His kingdom, there is, whether it's intentional or not, I'm not sure, but there is a sweet, ironic contrast in the account that perhaps is easily missed.

Just ponder on this for a moment. The centurion, in verse 8, asserts that he does not deserve to have Jesus under his roof. Notice what he says there in verse 8, the centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. Sometimes translated in maybe more helpful language where it's translated, I am not worthy. I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

[24 : 41] That is the view of the centurion. Now, it's significant, I think, that Jesus does not correct him. He doesn't say, oh, no, you're being silly. You know, that's a false modesty. No, no, no, no.

Of course you're worthy to have me under your roof. Jesus doesn't say that, because it's true. He is not worthy to have Jesus under his roof. And so, the centurion will not, or in his estimation, cannot receive Jesus into his home as he is unworthy. And with that as the backdrop, we then hear Jesus declaring that he, that Jesus, will gladly and unreservedly welcome into his home to sit at his table under his roof, not only the centurion, but the unworthy of the world.

The unworthy of the world are welcome under his roof in his kingdom to sit at his table from north, south, east, and west. However unworthy you may consider yourself to be, indeed, however unworthy you are. The unworthy of the world are welcome in the kingdom of heaven to sit at the Lord's table.

So, the participants of the feast are numerous, they're diverse, and one final thing I would say about these participants, and I would say this, that all are present. Now, what do I mean by all?

Well, by using that word, I simply want to make clear and emphasize that the numerous and diverse will comprise all of God's people. Not one of God's people will be missing. We don't have time to look into this in detail, but on a previous occasion we did touch on this passage. At the inaugural covenant meal recorded for us in Exodus chapter 24 that serves as a foretaste of this great feast, God permitted a select group of leaders, the elders of Israel, in representation of the people to join in the feast, but not so in the feast that Jesus describes. All will be there. All of his people will be there.

[27 : 09] Which brings us to the final thing that we want to say about the feast that Jesus touches on, and that is the key to the feast, or the key that opens the door to the banqueting hall.

Jesus suggestively speaks of how the many will take their places at the feast. I say to you, verse 11, I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places. They'll take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that rather begs the question, how do they have a place at all? How is it that there is a place for them? Well, there is one common reality that joins and unites all who will be at the feast. Indeed, it is the reason that they will be there. And what is that? Well, the one thing that unites them is faith in God. They are united by their shared trust in God. And to substantiate and to illustrate this assertion, let's just notice two of those who will be there that figure prominently in our passage. First of all, the centurion. Indeed, everything that Jesus is saying is in the context of this encounter with the centurion.

And what does Jesus say about this centurion? In verse 10, when Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following, I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. This was the great characteristic of this man that Jesus is highlighting and commending and celebrating and using in contrast to those who are following him. His faith in Jesus, his trust in Jesus as the one who is able and willing to help him. As his son, his servant, the one he loves dearly, lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. He believes that Jesus can help. He puts his trust in Jesus. But then who is the other character, the most prominent character mentioned by name, by Jesus as he speaks of this feast? Well, he speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All three are important, but if we just limit ourselves to Abraham. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the great patriarchs of the nation of Israel. Why are they at the feast? Why do they have a place at the table? Are they at the feast in recognition of their many exploits and achievements in the service of God? Is their presence at the feast a prize or reward for distinguished service? No. What is the fundamental truth the Bible provides to us concerning Abraham? Well, it is this. Abraham believed. Abraham believed. Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham believed the promises of God. Abraham trusted in

God. This is why Abraham will be at the table. This is why there is a place for Abraham at the great banquet. The many who believe will be there. The diverse who believe will be there. The Jews who believe will be there. The Gentiles who believe will be there. You must believe. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Trust in Jesus as your Savior and your Lord.

Now, we would be guilty of gross negligence if we ignored the solemn flip side to this truth, this truth that those who believe will be at the feast. And the flip side concerns the fate of those who do not believe. And this is something that Jesus also deals with and solemnly speaks about.

[31 : 18] In verse 12, we read, But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, if you were to read this in isolation, it just doesn't seem to make any sense. Why would the subjects of the kingdom be thrown out? Surely, if they're subjects of the kingdom, then they belong there. Who are these subjects of the kingdom, or literally the sons of the kingdom? Well, they are those who have been born into the privilege of God's people. And in this case, he's speaking about the Jews who are following him, and listening to him, and analyzing all that he says, and dissecting it. And he's saying, you are part of the kingdom. You've been born into the kingdom. You've been born into the family, but you will not be there. You will be cast out. Why?

Because you don't believe. The centurion believes. He trusts in me, but you don't. You stand over me, and judge me, and determine if what I say is right or wrong. You don't put your trust in me.

You don't believe in me. You don't recognize me as the promised Messiah, as your Savior. You don't believe in me. You don't trust in me. And so, you will be cast out of the kingdom.

In a very real sense, you're on the inside. You will be cast out. Why? Because you don't believe. Jesus is drawing particular attention to the poignant plight of those born into the privileges of God's people, the sons of the kingdom. Such a birthright was and is a privilege. But in the absence of faith, in the absence of putting our trust in Jesus, such a birthright is of no eternal value. Indeed, it only serves to magnify the guilt of our unbelief. It is good to consider the delights of heaven. But we must also with Jesus ponder on the miseries of hell. And notice the somber language that Jesus employs. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside. And if we had to focus on one word, and maybe it's not the most dramatic word, but one word that really speaks volumes about the miseries of hell. It's the word outside. Outside. Cast outside. Far from God and all that is good, and all that is gracious, and all that is loving, and all that is beautiful. Outside. Into the darkness.

Far from the light of God's presence, and radiance, and glory. And for such who are cast outside, there is left only weeping and gnashing of teeth. But that need not be the outcome for any of us present here this morning. That need not be the outcome for any of us. The arms of the Lord are open to gladly receive all who will come and put their trust in Him. All who like the centurion, conscious of their inability to solve their own problem, their own plight, put their trust in Jesus as the one who can, and is willing and is able to save and to save to the uttermost. The one who welcomes the unworthy and embraces the sinner. Jesus assures us in these words that many will come, many will come.

[35 : 00] Will you be one of them? Let us pray.