

Do this in remembrance of me

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- [0 : 0 0] This morning we listened to the words of Jesus addressed to His disciples in the upper room on the eve of His sacrificial death.
- Greater love has no man than this, that He lay down His life for His friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.
- And we recognize that the principal command that Jesus had in mind that He was exhorting and instructing His disciples to obey, the principal command was the one that He had just reminded them of.
- This is my command that you love one another. But we also noted at the end of the sermon this morning that on this same occasion, Jesus left His disciples with a further command, Do this in remembrance of Me, as He celebrated the Passover with them, as He broke the bread and served the wine.
- Do this in remembrance of Me. And it is to this command that we want to, this evening, turn our attention. And we do that with the purpose that considering this matter would help us to obey the command with understanding when we gather around the Lord's table next Sunday.
- [1 : 3 0] So, this is the command that we consider, Do this in remembrance of Me. What we're going to do is go through a number of questions that we can pose to this command and seek to answer them, and in so doing, present an overview of what is involved in obeying this command of Jesus directed to us.
- The first thing we want to do, and this will be very brief, is simply to ask, what is it that we are to do? What Jesus says is, do this, do this in remembrance of Me. Well, what is the this that we are to do?
- And then, and we'll spend more time on the second question, why are we to do it? Jesus Himself focuses on the why of this command, and we want to do the same.
- Why are we to do what it is Jesus is commanding us here? But the words of Jesus in this command also point to and answer the question, when are we to obey this command?
- When is it that we are to obey this command that He left His disciples and also leaves to us? Do this in remembrance of Me. And then finally, another question that we can fruitfully, I hope, consider, how are we to do it?
- [2 : 5 0] In what manner are we to obey this commandment? Do this in remembrance of Me. Perhaps before we go through each of these questions, there would be profit in reading again the verses in 1 Corinthians.
- We've read them already, but they are just brief verses that reading them again, I think maybe will be helpful just to have in our mind as we proceed. 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 23, and certainly it would be helpful for you to have your Bibles open there in that passage.
- For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. Now this is Paul, of course, speaking, addressing the Christians in Corinth. The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread.

And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is for Me. Do this in remembrance of Me. There we have the command on the lips of Jesus.

In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of Me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

[4 : 08] First then, what is it that we are to do? When Jesus says, Do this in remembrance of Me. What is the this that we are to do? Well, that is a simple question to answer.

We are to eat the bread and drink the wine. In other words, and very simply, we are to participate in the Lord's Supper. That is what Jesus was saying to His disciples.

I want you to participate. On the occasion that He instituted, of course, the sacrament, He wanted them to participate there and then as they were involved in it.

But then as He says, Do this in remembrance of Me, it is clear that what He is asking them to do is to continue participating in this sacrament. In eating the bread, in drinking the wine.

That is what we are to do. We are to eat. We are to drink. We are to participate. We will touch on that a little later on as we look through the other questions.

[5 : 05] But I wanted very quickly just to answer that first question. What is it that we are to do? But moving on to a question that we will spend more time on. Why are we to do it?

Why are we to do this that Jesus commands us to do? Well, the first thing we could say in the light of what we were considering this morning, we could answer that question, the question why, very simply, in this way.

We are to do what Jesus commands simply because He commands it. And we are to obey. We are duty-bound to render to our Lord the obedience that He requires of us.

This morning, of course, we were thinking a lot about this matter of obedience and how our obedience is the manner in which we demonstrate that we are indeed friends of Jesus. So in answer to the question, why are we to do this?

Why are we to do this in remembrance of Jesus? Well, simply because we are duty-bound to obey Jesus as He commands us. Sometimes we use the language when we speak of the Lord's Supper, we speak of it as an ordinance.

[6 : 15] And, of course, that word ordinance carries that meaning, that which is commanded, that which God commands us to do. And so, as an ordinance, we must obey.

We must do what God commands us to do. Jesus bids us eat, so we eat. He bids us drink, so we drink. It's really as simple as that.

But, of course, in addition to that very fundamental answer to the question, why are we to obey? Why are we to do this in remembrance of Jesus? In addition to that answer, Jesus Himself gives a very explicit answer, a very explicit reason for participating in the Lord's Supper.

He says, do this in remembrance of Me. So, He gives a reason. He doesn't just say, do it. He says, do it for this reason. Do it in remembrance of Me.

Now, the word translated remembrance has the meaning of recalling or bringing to mind. Well, what are we to recall or bring to mind as we participate in the Lord's Supper?

[7 : 28] Next Sunday morning, if you are to be at the Lord's table participating in the Lord's Supper, what is it that you are to bring to mind? What is it that you would profitably and fruitfully recall or bring to mind as you participate?

Well, Jesus makes it clear that we are, in the first instance, to remember Him. Do this in remembrance of Me. We remember Jesus.

We remember who He is. And we remember what He has done. Very especially, and we might say obviously, but nonetheless, though obvious, we have to stress, we are to remember His death, His broken body, and shed blood.

The elements of the bread and the wine serve as visual images, visual aids to help us to fix our attention, to bring to our memory, to recall the death of Jesus.

We remember His death as the pivotal moment of the totality of His saving work, all of which we remember, but at the heart of it, we remember His death.

[8 : 42] We remember that He became flesh in order for His flesh to be broken. We remember that He left heaven to come into our sin-sick world.

We remember that He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. We remember that He was a curse for us. We remember that He was a curse for us.

We remember that He bore on the cross the sins of the world and paid fully the wages of sin. We remember that He was a curse for us.

We remember that He was a curse for us. We remember that as the cursed sin-bearer, He was abandoned by the Father and so cried out, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But we remember also that death could not hold Him down and that the Father raised Him from the grave in vindicating power on the third day.

[9 : 50] But we also remember not only the events surrounding the death of Jesus, but we remember and bring to mind all that His death has achieved for sinners such as we are.

We remember that it is His death that secures for us forgiveness of sins, that He paid the price on our behalf.

We remember that His death secures for us reconciliation, friendship with God, that His death secures for us adoption into the family of God, that His death secures for us eternal life, or life in all its fullness that begins now and continues ever richer into eternity.

We also remember as we participate that Jesus is today seated at the right hand of the Father and governs over all and that He will return.

Indeed, in the words of institution, certainly in the manner in which it is presented to us by Paul, there is explicit reference to this forward perspective of His coming, of His return.

[11 : 07] We are only to participate until He comes, as we see there in verse 26. And so when we speak about remembering, the word remember, of course, very much has in our own mind the connotation of looking back.

And you could say that largely that is what we do. We look back to what Jesus did for us as He died on the cross. But when we think of the word remember as having that broader meaning of bringing to mind, there's also the element of looking forward, of looking forward to His return.

We participate until He comes. Today, He is seated at the right hand of the Father and He governs the universe. And the day is coming when He will return.

And as we gather at the Lord's table and remember Jesus, we also remember that reality and look forward to that reality. But do we only remember?

We're answering the question, why are we to obey this command? Well, we obey because we are called to obey. We obey because that is what we do.

[12 : 18] That is how we demonstrate we're Christians. But Jesus gives us this explicit reason. We obey or we participate for this reason to remember Jesus.

But the question I'm asking is, is that all we do? Is it only about remembering? Well, I would say this, that as we remember, we also proclaim and receive.

Now, I want to stress the way in which I've phrased this. As we remember, we also proclaim and receive. I'm not suggesting that these are three separate activities. The principal thing that we do is what Jesus Himself tells us that we should do.

Do this in remembrance of Me. Remembrance is at the heart of what we're doing. But as we remember, we also concurrently, if you wish, proclaim and receive.

Let's think of these two words. We proclaim. Well, again, this is something that is stated explicitly in these words of institution. In verse 26 of 1 Corinthians 11, we read, For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

[13 : 32] We proclaim the Lord's death. What does that mean? What does that look like? Well, at one level, we could say that the symbols themselves, the bread and the wine, proclaim the Lord's death.

They are, as we mentioned a moment ago, visual aids that announce that He died, and also speak of the violent nature of His death, the bread that is broken, the blood that is poured out.

And so, simply in having visible to us these elements, the bread and the wine, in that alone, there is a proclamation of the Lord's death.

But it's possible that Paul also has in mind that as part of the celebration, as part of this participating in the Lord's Supper, there will be a recounting of the story of the cross, a proclamation of the gospel message centered on Calvary and on what was achieved by the death of Jesus at Calvary.

And so, in that sense, also, we proclaim. So, not only the visible symbols proclaiming the death of Christ, not only are our participating in them proclaiming the death of Christ, but the accompanying narrative, if you wish, the accompanying proclamation of the gospel is a way in which we also proclaim His death until He comes.

[15 : 04] So, as we remember, we proclaim. But also, I said that as we remember, we receive. What do I mean by we receive? Well, very simply, we are fed.

There is bread, there is wine, we partake of them, we are fed. Now, we've already noted that what we do is eat and drink. And we do so in order to receive, in order to be fed.

We feed on Christ. At the Lord's Supper, we feed on Christ. Our faith is fed and nurtured as we eat and as we drink.

We do not believe that the bread and the wine become anything other than bread and wine. They are symbols. They begin as bread and wine, and they continue as bread and wine.

We do not physically feed on Christ in that sense, but we do spiritually feed on Christ. Our confession, the Westminster Confession, expresses it in this way.

[16 : 11] Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in the sacrament, that is, the bread and the wine, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of His death.

As we remember, we also receive. As we remember by our participation, and as we drink the wine and eat the bread, we receive, we are fed, we feed on Christ.

We can put it this way, and we can say, I think, legitimately, we can say that Christ Himself feeds us at His table. It is His table, and He is the one who feeds us at His table.

And in that sense, we can speak of the real presence of Christ. Now, the term, the real presence of Christ, has a precise meaning in theological jargon, I suppose, and sometimes is used to speak of the physical presence.

We've already stated that we don't believe that that is so. There's nothing in the passage to suggest that the bread and the wine are anything other than bread and wine. So, we're not for a moment, when we speak of the real presence of Christ, suggesting otherwise.

[17 : 39] But I think we can use that expression properly understood, that Jesus is the one who serves us, and in that sense, there is a real presence, not physically or materially, but spiritually and actually.

We shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that because something is spiritual, it's somehow less real. We sometimes think that, oh, well, spiritually, but that means something a bit vague and not very real, not very tangible.

Well, by no means. The spiritual presence of Christ is a very real presence. It has been expressed, I think, helpfully, it has been expressed in this way.

Christ is not present on the table, but at the table. Maybe that little expression helps to visualize it for us. Not on the table, not in the bread and the wine in some mysterious way, that these elements become literally, physically, the blood and the body of Christ.

Not on the table, but at the table. At the head of the table, if you wish. Feeding His people. So, why?

[18 : 49] Why are we to do it? Do this in remembrance of me. Why? Well, in obedience. Why? Because Jesus tells us that as we do, we remember His death.

We remember Him. And as we remember, very especially His death, as we remember, we also proclaim and we receive. That takes us on to the next question that we want to consider.

This one very briefly, and then we have one further one that we'll spend a little bit more time on. But very briefly, the question, when are we to do it? When are we to do it? Well, what is the command?

Do this in remembrance of me. Now, this verb that is used, do this, the form of the verb is a present continuous.

Really, all that means is that it carries the force of a regular and permanent celebration or participation of the sacrament. We are to participate regularly and permanently, as we will notice also in a moment, until He comes.

[19 : 53] It is an end point that is indicated, but until that end point comes, we are to participate in this continuous way, regularly and permanently. Now, of course, that obviously begs the question, well, how regularly?

We know that in our own church tradition, the regularity of participation, it has been regular, but the regularity has been twice a year.

And in many congregations, and our own included, we have increased the regularity, and we participate every other month, six times a year. The reality, of course, is that the New Testament doesn't tell us with what frequency we should participate in the Lord's Supper.

And because it doesn't tell us, it would be very unwise to be dogmatic on this matter. I'm not going to go into this in any detail. It seems to me that as we read through the New Testament, the suggestion seems to be of greater frequency, possibly even weekly.

But as I say, that's not something that I would be or anybody should be dogmatic about. The important thing is that it is regular. I would suggest the more regular, the better, but certainly irregular.

[21 : 10] Do this, do this in remembrance of me. And as we noted, there's another time reference in the passage, until he comes. We are to do this until our Lord returns.

The final question that I commented that we would pose and try and answer is, how are we to do it? And here I'm thinking of the manner in which we participate. And there's three things I would say.

No doubt there's many more, but three that I want to mention this evening. The first thing I would say is that we are to participate with gratitude. On the first occasion, when our Lord instituted the sacrament, we read, The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said.

So Jesus Himself expresses gratitude to the Father for this provision. And in so doing, He gives us an example that we too ought to participate in this manner with gratitude.

And I would say on a practical note that we shouldn't think that this requirement to participate with gratitude is exhausted by the presiding minister praying as part of the sacrament.

[22 : 21] Or as we begin to participate. Of course, that is right and proper. We should pray. And the minister does lead us in prayer. And that is as it should be. But let's not think that that exhausts this requirement that we participate with gratitude.

All of us as believers, as Christians who are to participate, we are to approach the table and participate at the table with an inward and conscious sense of gratitude.

Surely that is what ought to characterize our remembrance. As we recall and bring to mind what Jesus has done and the death that He died, we recall with gratitude.

And we recall even in our own hearts giving thanks to Jesus for what He has done for us. So that is one thing we can say concerning the manner.

How are we to participate? Well, with gratitude. But I would say secondly, with care. Why do I say with care? Well, if we move on to what Paul goes on to say, not in verses that we read, but a little further down in the passage.

[23 : 27] We read in verse 28 concerning the manner in which we are to participate. We read, A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

A man ought to examine himself. And here I'm going to be very brief and simply say this, that the purpose of the examination that is commended is not to dissuade us from participating, but to prepare us for participating.

As we examine ourselves, we better appreciate our sin. We better appreciate our need of the benefits the death of Christ has secured for us.

And so, as we examine ourselves, we recognize our condition, we repent of our sin, and we participate. And we participate.

I think the language of the authorized version captures it somewhat better if my memory serves me right. Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat. That captures the idea.

[24 : 29] Examination for the purpose of participation. Not for the purpose of saying, oh, I couldn't possibly participate. No, we examine ourselves in order that we might participate aright.

With gratitude, with care. But one other thing I would say, and that is with others. The Lord's Supper is an element of public worship. It is a family celebration.

The family of God celebrating God's Son and His death for us at Calvary. It's not intended to be something that is exclusively and intensely personal.

Sometimes we have this idea that, oh, this is a very personal thing. And even the body language, as we participate, we have our heads down and our eyes closed, and it's as if nobody else need be around us.

Me and God. We have to be careful of that. This is a public celebration. It's a family celebration. Open your eyes and look around and thank God for those who are participating with you in this supper, in this meal of thanksgiving.

[25 : 35] We participate with others. But as we draw things to a close, the most important thing for us as Christians is that we do this. The command uses that language.

Do this in remembrance of me. Do this. Just do it. Do this in remembrance of me. Let me finish with a story that I have told before but may be helpful for some.

And the story is of a wee boy who is at the dinner table. And he informs his mother that he's not going to have tea that night. Everybody's gathered.

The whole family are there. The table is served. His tea is before him. And he says, I'm not going to have tea tonight, Mom. And his mother asks him, well, why is this?

Why aren't you going to eat tonight? And he says, oh, no. I'm not going to eat tonight because my hands are dirty. I've been outside. I've been playing. My hands are dirty. So I'm not going to eat tonight. Now, what does the mother do?

[26 : 37] What would you imagine the mother saying to the wee boy in that scenario? Would the mother say to the wee boy, oh, my son, I'm so proud of you that you realize that you shouldn't eat with dirty hands.

That's really good. You've really learned the lesson. And you're quite right. You shouldn't have your tea tonight. You'll go to bed without your tea because you've got dirty hands. Would the mother say that to the boy?

Well, of course the mother wouldn't say that. What would the mother say? Well, you don't need me to tell you. The mother would say to him, go to the bathroom, wash your hands, come back and eat. Of course, that's what she would say. And this is the matter at hand here.

Yes, we are sinners. Yes, our hands are dirty. Is that a reason for not participating? No. We go, we wash our hands. We receive the forgiveness that we are offered and that is freely available to us.

We examine ourselves. We recognize our need. We repent of our sin and we participate. And we participate. Do this. Do this. Do this. Do this.

[27 : 38] In remembrance of me. Let us pray. Of course. I mean, we don't hesitate to ask no one. We