Proclaiming Christ Together

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:26

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**Scriptures:** Exodus 24:1-8; 1 Corinthians 11.17-26

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 211, 284, 73c, 381, 288, 103, 325, The Power of the Cross

Series: Occasional (Lord’s Supper)

Theme: The apostle Paul exhorts the church at Corinth that when they come together to celebrate Lord’s Supper, they remember the reason why Christ instituted this commemoration and celebration of the new covenant so that they could together proclaim His death until he comes again.

Proposition: When we rightly celebrate the sacrament of Lord’s Supper, we publicly declare by faith the past event of Christ’s death, the present reality of our new covenant union together in Him and our certain hope of His return in glory.

**Introduction**

At times in life we make formal, official declarations in the presence of other people for example:

* When a man and a woman commit themselves to one another and are married.
* When a person makes a public profession of faith
* When a man being ordained to office in the church makes vows

What was the Corinthian church declaring when they celebrated the ‘love feast’ communal meal within which Lord’s Supper took place? Sadly, from our reading in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, we can see that it was not a good declaration/proclamation. It was not what Christ intends for the celebration of Lord’s Supper. When the church in Corinth came together:

* They demonstrated a self-centeredness: “*For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal*” (v21a).
* Some were fed with plenty and consumed too much, whilst others went without “*One goes hungry, another gets drunk*” (v21b).
* It seems clear that the poor were not being cared for by the rich “*do you …. humiliate those who have nothing*? (v22).
* Clear divisions within the church were evident at the celebration of Lord’s Supper which showed a contempt, a despising, of the church of God (v22).

As a result, the Apostle Paul concluded that their Lord’s Supper celebration was ‘*not for the better, but for the worse*’ (v17). He did not commend them because the official declaration that they were making in their commemoration of Lord’s Supper did not fit with the purpose for which Christ instituted this sacrament, in fact it was a proclamation which opposed our Lord’s new covenant work.

This morning, from our text in 1 Corinthians 11:26, we consider what we are called to declare in our celebration of Lord’s Supper so that our proclamation matches Christ’s intent for this blessed celebration. We’ll do this under three headings:

* Declaring the Lord’s death
* Declaring the new covenant
* Declaring our hope in Christ’s return

1. **Declaring the Lord’s death**

We are all familiar with commemorating significant past events with a special celebration at which time we look back with remembrance. We usually do this on the birthday of a family member or friend, or for a husband and wife, on the anniversary of their wedding day.

Countries commemorate key events in their own history. For example, in New Zealand we celebrate Anzac Day remembering not only the soldiers who died on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915, but all New Zealanders killed in wars throughout our history. As a nation, we declare our thankfulness for their sacrifices.

Similarly, but much more importantly: Lord’s Supper commemorates the most significant past event in God’s work of salvation in human history- the death of the Son of God on a cross at Calvary over 2,000 years ago. Lord’s Supper is a **looking back** in time. We remember/bring to mind, that Jesus Christ died. The Apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian believers of Christ’s call to remember His death: “*When He had given thanks, He broke it (bread) and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in* ***remembrance*** *of Me."* (1 Cor 11:24) **“***In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in* ***remembrance*** *of Me."* (1 Cor 11:25)

We can see from our text in verse 17 that Lord’s Supper is not only a meal of commemoration, but also a meal of confession. The confession is a collective one which we make together as we declare the Lord’s death. We do this at the table, not with words, but through our eating and drinking of the solid and liquid substances which represent the body and blood of our Lord. “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death*” (v26). We are making a declaration when we eat and drink – a collective proclamation for all who see us at the table.

What is that proclamation? That Jesus died. His blood was shed, and His body was without life just after he said, “*It is finished*’ (John 19:30). We know that Jesus died because:

* The soldiers at the cross came to Jesus and saw that he was dead (John 19:33) and so did not break his legs. Doing so was a common practice in the 1st century Roman world to speed up the agonising ordeal of dying on a cross
* One of the soldiers pierced the side of the body of Jesus and separated blood and water poured out. This indicated death.
* A centurion, who would have been familiar with death by crucifixion, officially confirmed to Pontius Pilate that Jesus had died (Mark 15:44).
* The dead body of Jesus was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb (Matt 27:59).

Many people have died throughout human history. In Roman times, many were executed by public crucifixion. This was a punishment reserved for the worst criminals. A Roman citizen was protected by law from undergoing this extreme form of painful death and public humiliation.

What made the death of Jesus different from any other death including any other death by crucifixion? Unlike everyone else who has ever died, Jesus was truly innocent. “*he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth*” (Isaiah 53:9). He was completely without sin (Heb:15). Throughout His life on this earth He was loved by God as His only begotten son. “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matt 3:17; 17:5). Yet God, because He so loved the world and sent His Son Jesus to grant salvation to His people, transferred the unholy sins of many to His holy beloved Son.

Brothers and sisters “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus suffered the pains of hell itself so that people like you and me never would. He was abandoned, forsaken, rejected, by His Heavenly Father, who had loved Him from before the world began (John 17:24).

At Lord’s Supper we look back and proclaim the death of our Lord; a death like no other, a death that brings life to those dead in their trespasses and sins. A death that fulfils God’s promise of a new covenant. Which brings us to our 2nd point.

1. **Declaring the new covenant**

God’s promise to Abraham to bless him and his descendants was an agreement, a promise, a covenant, confirmed with blood. Blood was shed when a 3-year-old heifer, female goat, ram, turtledove and pigeon were cut in half and the covenant confirmed by the Lord God as He symbolically passed though the slain creatures (Gen 15). God confirmed His covenant with the people of Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham through His servant Moses. Moses “*took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.*" (Exo 24:8).

Blood signifies cleansing from sin. As the writer to the Hebrews says “*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*” (Heb 9:22). Blood also signifies that the ultimate penalty for covenant breaking is death. The covenant is a binding commitment made by God to unite Himself in relationship with a particular people; “*I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God*” (Exodus 6:7).

These privileged people are the ‘new Israel’ the spiritual descendants of Christ (Gal 3:29). Christ kept the covenant by perfectly obeying the law of God when He lived on this earth. Christ paid the penalty of death on behalf of the covenant-breakers for whom He died. This is why He says of the contents of the Lord’s Supper cup: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*”.

When we proclaim the death of the Jesus, we proclaim the new covenant. That agreement whereby God promises to: **“***Put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*." (Jer 31:31-34). When we eat the bread and drink the cup at the Lord’s Supper, we declare that God has fulfilled His promise of the new covenant in Christ.

The cup in Scripture frequently represents God’s judgement. At Lord’s Supper the righteous judgement of God upon His own Son who willingly took upon Himself the sins of others is proclaimed. We declare that by faith in Christ we receive all the benefits of His covenant-keeping and of His death on behalf of covenant-breakers like you and me.

As we’ve seen from 1 Corinthians 11, those to whom Paul wrote were **not** proclaiming the realities of the new covenant. They were not displaying the evidence of knowing the Lord, of having the will of God in their hearts. Instead, they were treating the remembrance of Christ and His work with contempt, some viewing it merely as a way to satisfy their own physical hunger and desire for drink. Lord’s Supper is **not** essentially about being physically fed.

However, there is real spiritual nourishment given by Christ at the table. Our souls are nourished so that real spiritual benefit is obtained,

* Faith is strengthened and preserved.
* Grace is conveyed; not by the church, but through the blessing of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in those who by faith receive the bread and wine.
* Our communion/union with God and with one another is strengthened.

We declare these new covenant present realities when we celebrate Lord’s Supper as Christ intends; that is in union with Him and with one another. We also look forward in hope to the future. This brings us to our 3rd point.

1. **Declaring our hope in Christ’s return**

Not one of us here today saw Jesus die with our own eyes. None of us have met the Risen Christ physically on this earth. We believe that this took place by faith. This faith is informed by the historical records of Scripture with the eyewitness testimonies of those who were there.

We believe the Word of our Lord e.g. “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*." (Matt 28:20) "*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God;believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*” (John 14:1-3). We believe that Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection yet to come (1 Cor 15:20).

Lord’s Supper has the aspect of looking back to the cross in remembrance of what Christ has done. The sacrament also has an aspect of representing present realities; our union in Christ. There is also a future focus to this celebration; Christ’s death was not the end, but the beginning of the end of this age. In the supper there is a looking forward to the second coming of Christ when He will take us to Himself in the New Heavens and New Earth.

The Lord’s Supper celebration looks forward in hope; forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev 19:9). Our hope is strengthened as we declare our united firm expectation of Christ’s return in glory and our hope that we will live forever with our Lord.

As we celebrate Lord’s Supper in the way in which Christ intends, we look back, remembering his death. We embody ourselves as the gathered church the realities of the new covenant: changed hearts transformed by the grace of God. We also look forward to the future of Christ’s return with hope. “Come, Lord Jesus, Come!”

AMEN