



**Idea:** Communion is a beautiful picture of the gracious sacrifice of Christ for us.

**Intro:** There is something about a meal that can make you feel right at home or just the opposite. Few things are more comforting than home-cooked food with loving family and friends. And few things make you feel like more of a stranger than eating food you have never heard of, with people you have never met, and in a place with customs you do not understand.

Today, if someone were to ask you if you ever eat a meal at church, you will most likely say, “Yeah, we occasionally have a fellowship meal after worship or sometimes enjoy lunch together after a funeral.” And you would be completely correct. These meals, however, are not the only meals we partake together as a church family. We also enjoy the Lord’s Supper or Communion together. Now, this meal is not enough to fill anyone’s stomach, but we are eating, drinking, and seated together. It is taken together with family and friends, but it is very much different than any other meal we eat. For those who are not part of our church family or who are not followers of Christ, it will seem strange and perhaps even confusing. Therefore, I want us to think about what it means to observe communion together.

The Bible says that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Who are the lost? The Bible says that we are all lost. We have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom 3:23); we have rejected His design. Therefore, Jesus, God the Son, came to make a way for rebellious sinners to come into fellowship and communion with Holy God. How does that happen? The thought of a hater of God being embraced and welcomed into the family of God is as unimaginable as the mixing of oil and water is to a chemist. Yet sinners being sought out and redeemed by God is the metanarrative, the grand story, of Scripture. It is what the whole of the Bible is about.

Today, as we prepare ourselves as believers and followers of Jesus Christ to participate in the Lord’s Supper or communion, we would do well to remember what this meal is. In the Old Testament we discover that the people of Israel routinely held sacred assemblies or official occasions whereby God’s people collectively gathered to worship the Lord, to repent of personal and corporate sin, to remember God’s blessings on them, and to anticipate future blessings. Sacred assemblies were times for God’s people to confess and repent of sin. They were times to renew the covenant relationship with the Lord and return to Him in faithful love and obedience. They were times for worship and sacrifice, feasting and fasting. God’s people like us today, tended to stray from the Lord and His Word. Sacred assemblies were also opportunities for them to remember and celebrate God’s gracious activity in their lives.

The Lord’s Supper is a ceremonial meal whereby we remember and celebrate the grace of God in our lives. It is built upon the Passover Meal that Jesus celebrated with His disciples. There in the upper room, they set the table with bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and four cups of wine. The roasted lamb was brought to the table as the twelve disciples gathered with Jesus. Little do they know this would be the last Passover meal they would

eat with their Master. The Passover celebrated and remembered the grace of God in the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt through the blood smeared upon the doorframes of their houses.

Jesus brought a fulfillment to the meal in His sacrifice and the blood He shed for sinners. In Communion, we reflect upon Jesus' great sacrifice and the price He paid to bring us into fellowship with God the Father. What is it that brings sinners into communion and fellowship with Holy God?

**Inquiry:** The answer is found in Acts 8. In this passage Philip is directed to go to a certain place by the Holy Spirit. When he arrived, Philip found a court official from Ethiopia who had been to Jerusalem to worship. He was seeking God. When Philip approached the man, he was reading from Isaiah 53. From this text Philip preached the gospel to the man.

Read Acts 8:29-31, 35-38.

Philip told the Ethiopian that God created Him for Himself. He explained that God had a design for his life, and he told him that if he would live within that design then he would experience all the blessings God wanted to give him. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian, like you and I, had rejected God's design. His rejection was sin, and sin separates one from God. The man's sin and separation from God created brokenness in his life. In my sanctified imagination, I can see the Ethiopian nodding his head as he realized the brokenness in his life. He had gone to Jerusalem to seek the God of the Jews to fix his brokenness. Philip explained that God uses the brokenness to get man's attention, to create a desire for something more. Philip told him there was nothing he could do to fix the brokenness, but there was something that God had done to fix it. Philip told the man that Isaiah spoke of the Messiah who would come to fix his brokenness and cleanse his sin. This is the good news of the Bible. Philip explained that Jesus Christ is God the Son who came to earth to die a sacrificial death. He was crucified on the cross, buried in a tomb, but on the third day Jesus rose from the dead. Now, because of His sacrifice and resurrection, he could be forgiven of all sin and recover God's design for his life. Philip told the man that knowing what Jesus had done was not enough; he had to repent of his sin and believe on Jesus.

The Ethiopian man immediately desired to repent of his sin and place his faith in Jesus. He wanted to completely identify with Jesus, which is illustrated by his desire to be baptized. So that day, a high-ranking court official from Ethiopia heard the gospel, placed his faith in Jesus, and publicly identified with Christ through baptism.

What is it that brings sinners into communion and fellowship with Holy God? The atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection from the dead is the only thing that brings rebellious sinners into relationship with God. And the Lord's Supper is a beautiful picture of the gracious sacrifice of Christ for us. The bread represents the body of Jesus that bore our sin. The Bible says that as sinners we are all condemned and under the wrath of God the Father (Rom 8). Jesus, however, on the cross took our sin upon Himself. He experienced the full wrath of God as the Father exhausted His fury against our sin. The juice represents the blood of Jesus that was shed for sin. The Bible says that *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins* (Heb 9:22). He died on our behalf as a sacrificial lamb. Because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ our sins, which are like scarlet, are made white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they become like wool (Isaiah 1:18).

How should we approach this communion meal?

We approach communion:

### **1. In relationship with Jesus.**

Philip's purpose in sharing the gospel with the Ethiopian was not to make him more religious. The man's religious endeavors had not brought peace to his life. It had not made him right with God.

Philip's purpose was to introduce him to the Lord. On that day, this man came into relationship with Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. He became a child of God and part of the royal family of heaven. Therefore, a seat was added to the family's table for him. We approach communion in relationship with Jesus.

When Paul addresses the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, he is speaking to believers. The Lord's Supper is reserved for those who are in relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not a religious, ritual meal whereby you can please God. It is a meal of remembrance whereby you are confronted with the reality of sin and of a Savior. It is meant to lead you to a place of celebration and sanctification, which cannot happen if you have not yet come to the place of confession and repentance of sin.

## **2. In identification with Jesus and His church.**

When the Ethiopian eunuch responded to the gospel in faith, the first thing he wanted to do was publicly identify with Jesus through baptism. The early church knew nothing of a person's profession of faith apart from publicly identifying through baptism. Many times, the public profession and baptism were simultaneous. Today, we have separated them, maybe to a fault, in response to other denominations that teach salvation comes through the act of baptism. In doing so, we have devalued the need for baptism in the life of the believer.

Why are believers baptized? It is the public demonstration of an inward change in a person's life. It pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as well as the death, burial, and resurrection of the believer. It is the public identification of a believer to Christ. Baptism is how the local church affirms a believer's profession of faith and identifies him or her with the Lord Jesus. Baptism is the way a believer shows up on the church and the world's radar as a follower of Christ. It is how we publicly profess faith in Jesus. Communion, then, is how we as the church regularly renew our profession of faith in Christ. In it we repeatedly reaffirm our commitment to the Lord and His family. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is not a private meal among friends. Instead, it is the church's public celebration of fellowship with Christ and one other.

For this reason, since the early church baptized believers when they placed their faith in Christ and practiced the Lord's Supper, we today should approach the Lord's Supper as a baptized follower of Jesus Christ, fully identified with Christ and His church.

## **3. In fellowship with Jesus.**

Read 1 Cor 11:27-32.

Paul warned the Corinthian believers to not approach the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. He warns us to not partake in the meal if we have unconfessed sin that we are holding onto. We should examine ourselves. Are there actions, habits, and strongholds in my life that need to be confessed to Jesus and repented of?

As we observe communion together, we do so in fellowship with Jesus. We first look to the cross because the bread and juice represent Jesus giving Himself for us. We look around at our faith family. This is the church's meal, sealing our fellowship with Christ and one another. We look ahead to the coming of Christ's kingdom (Matt 26:29; Rev 19:7, 9). And we look inward and back to the cross. It is a beautiful and appropriate time to examine ourselves and confess our sins to God. The gospel continues to save us. Jesus' forgiveness is readily available. The very point of communion is to point us back to the gospel that reconciles us to God.

By not doing this and approaching this holy meal in an inappropriate way, we bring judgment upon ourselves.

**Conclusion:** Are you in relationship with Jesus Christ? Have you knowingly and willingly repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus? If not, what would hold you back from doing that today?

Have you identified with Jesus and His church through baptism? Some of you might have been baptized as a child and then later became a follower of Jesus. If you have not been baptized post-conversion, then you need to follow the example of the Ethiopian and be baptized. Baptism always follows salvation. It never precedes it.

Are you in fellowship with Jesus? Is there sin that you are holding onto? Why not confess it, forsake it, and receive forgiveness?

Let's respond to the Lord's invitation. (Offer time for reflection.)

We are a covenant body of Christ that takes both our relationship with Jesus and community with one another seriously. We celebrate all that Jesus has done in us, and we celebrate the covenant we share with one another. We do not believe we are here by chance. Instead, by grace, God has brought us together so that we might express the life of Christ before a watching world. Before we observe communion together, let's reaffirm our covenant as a church. Read the covenant together.

Fence the table for the Lord's Supper. If you are in relationship with Jesus Christ, if you have been scripturally baptized (immersion), if you are in good fellowship with your church, and if you are not holding onto unconfessed sin, then I invite you to participate in the Lord's Supper this morning. However, if you are not, then I encourage you not to participate.

Observe communion.