

Communion Meditation: God on Display

Communion Meditation

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Bible Verse: Romans 5:8
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Tradition here in our church is we like to set the Communion service apart. Rather than simply having it at the end of a service that's focused on other themes, to bring forth a short meditation, a short devotional in order to truly prepare our hearts for Communion. The Lord Jesus said that we are to take Communion in a worthy manner and the first way that we do that is to put aside all of the other mental distractions in our life, all of the other things that would weigh us down and uniquely focus on Christ before we take of these elements that remind us of him.

A couple of things that I'll say just on the front end of this is just to remind you that Communion is for true Christians. As we take the elements, we are making a public declaration that not only do we have faith in Christ and we've trusted him alone for our salvation, but you're also making a tangible visible confession of your own sin and a confession that you have turned from that sin in order to turn to Christ and to ask him humbly to save you. Communion should not be taken by those who are not in Christ because it's a contradiction of the very thing that Communion represents. To take Communion when you don't belong to Christ or to take Communion when you know that you are consciously continuing in a sin that you refuse to repent of is to contradict the very spirit of what the whole death of Christ is supposed to represent.

So keep those things in mind as we prepare our hearts for Communion and what I'd like you to do is to turn to Romans 5:8 for just a brief moment of reflection on our Lord and to help us contemplate what it is that Communion puts on display as we partake of it as the body of Christ. In Romans 5:8 it says,

8 ... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us and the Bible says that that death of Christ was a demonstration of the love of God, and what I want to do here just ever so briefly is to give you four thoughts to frame your thinking as you receive Communion this morning and the common questions that are asked about so many different things: who, what, when and where. Who, what, when and where, and we ask, first of all, who made the display? Who made the display and the answer to that question is that it was the God of

righteousness, the God of holiness. Communion is a reminder to us of the holiness of God, that sin is a violation of his law, our sins are a violation of his righteousness, and Scripture describes God as a righteous God who suffers indignation every day at the sins of those who rebel against him, and that theme is the opening thought in Romans in many ways, as Paul gets into the substance of his argument.

Look at Romans 1:18 and we're just touching on these things ever so lightly, not trying to expound in any depth here this morning, but to remember in chapter 1, verse 18, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." He goes on in chapter 3, as you know, to say that this is true of all men; that there is none righteous, that there is none good, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come to the Table today, we should remember what we once were and what it was that Christ did and what he displayed for us. You were under the wrath of God and if you are not in Christ this morning, you are still under the righteous wrath of God against your sin and rebellion against him. Communion reminds us that we needed a sacrifice on our behalf in order to appease the wrath, to satisfy the wrath of a holy and righteous God, and that holiness and that wrath of God produces a sense of reverence and fear toward him. He has seen our sin. Communion is a reminder, first of all, that God cannot simply overlook sin; he cannot simply neglect it. Sin must be dealt with because he is a God of righteousness, he is a God of wrath, and on the cross Christ hung on the cross and God poured out his wrath on his own Son because that is what sin deserves, an eternal punishment, an eternal condemnation upon those who would sin against the eternal law of an eternal God. He's a God of righteousness. Communion reminds us that God does not take sin lightly, so seriously does he take it that he sent his own Son into the world to deal with it.

So who made this display on the cross? It was the God of righteousness that was at work. Now we ask a second question: what is it that was displayed on the cross in terms of Romans 5:8? And we remember this, go back to Romans 5:8, we'll kind of use this as our fulcrum point multiple times here in this brief devotion. Here in Romans 5:8 it says, "God demonstrates," God put on display, he publicly manifested what? "His own love toward us." His own love toward us, his own love toward his people, the people for whom Christ died. What is being displayed at the cross and what we are remembering at Communion is that God displayed the love of Christ at the cross of Calvary. In other words, the wrath of God is not his only single attribute. God in perfect harmony with all of these attributes reminds us and Communion reminds us that to us he is a God of love; that he is a God who has loved us, who has sought our good at his own personal cost in order to deliver us from his own righteous wrath.

Look at Romans 2:4 with me. How is it that sinners like us find ourselves in the family of God this morning? Well, at the heart motivation of it is a kindness of God. Romans 2:4 where Paul says, "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" The cross reminds us and Communion reminding us of the cross reminds us that God has shown to

you, a sinner, immeasurable, infinite, vast love, kindness, patience, a tolerance of your prior rebellion against him and he passed over your sins for the sake of Christ and so that you would have time to come to faith in Christ and be delivered from your sins; that though God had every prerogative, every righteous reason to pour out his wrath upon you, he held that wrath back and instead of pouring out that wrath, that anger, giving you the punishment that you deserved, instead Christ stepped into your place and he did that because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and that is a manifestation of his love, of his giving nature. Christ gave himself for you. Christ gave himself on the cross to redeem you from sin at incalculable cost. It wasn't only the physical suffering of the crucifixion that was inflicted upon him, he absorbed fully and extinguished the wrath of God against your sin. He felt the pains of eternal condemnation in his soul. The pain of punishment that belonged to you, he felt, he absorbed. He was the one upon whom it was inflicted.

Why? Who made him do that? The answer is obvious, isn't it? No one. No one tells God what to do. Christ voluntarily in concert with the consultation of the Godhead before the foundation of the world, Christ voluntarily agreed to come and do this; to come in obedience to his Father and in love for you, in love for his people, in love for his church, to absorb punishment on their behalf so that you and I could go free. That's love. That is a gift of undeserved incalculable proportions.

So when we take Communion together, when you hold the bread and the cup in your hand in just a few moments, you should remember the patience of God toward you as he overlooked all of your prior sin in order to give you time to repent. You should remember the grace, the undeserved favor that has been shown to you to be in Christ here this morning. You should remember how Christ gave himself for you. Galatians 2:20 says, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." This is a wonderful thing to remember and that's what Communion puts on display, it puts Christ on display as the one whose righteousness will not be compromised, whose love supplies the price necessary for your sin to be covered, and in love he intervened on your behalf.

Now go back to Romans 5:8 again with me. Romans 5:8, and as you're turning there, those of you that have been struggling this past week, maybe for a period of several weeks, you've been battling that besetting sin of yours or you've drifted away from your first love, let this display, this reminder of the love of Christ be that which warms your heart to come back, to come back with a sense of confidence that you have not been abandoned by Christ because this death was a death that was delivered once for all; it was a death designed to cover all of your sin. The fountain of cleansing blood flows freely and you are invited afresh to come and be washed in the blood of Christ for the cleansing from your sin. How can you know that that's true after such a life as you've lived maybe this past week and you're just conscious of the lingering guilt of your rebellion and indifference toward God? Well, let's remember when Christ displayed this love, when Christ was put on display and Romans 5:8 tells us.

Look at verse 8 with me again. When was this love displayed? "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ did this for us while we were yet sinners. The Gospel came to you, the Holy Spirit worked in

your heart to bring you to Christ while you were a sinner, lost, dead, and separated from God. God did not respond to you because you had done acts of righteousness or had somehow made yourself better and distinct from others and then God responded to you, he waited for you to take the first move as what so many people think. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be more wrong. Nothing could be a more wrong-headed way to think about the love of God. God loved us while we were yet sinners. Christ came into a world that was dead and dark and when he came into your life, he came into a life that was dead and dark. He didn't save you because you deserved it, he saved you while you were yet a sinner. Romans 4:5 says that God justifies the ungodly and so we come to Communion remembering that this Gospel came to us with power not when we deserved it but when we did not. It was while you were unrighteous that the Gospel came to you. It was when you were dead in trespasses and sins that God made you alive together with Christ. It was in the midst of that, it was during that time of deadness that God first loved you.

Look at Romans 5:6. Paul is going at length to make this point here in this particular context. He says, Romans 5:6, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

So beloved, as you reflect on that, as you contemplate that, there is this simultaneous sense that, "I never deserved this and I never could," and alongside that recognition of your unworthiness rises up and is put on display before your mind the great love of Christ to make a sacrifice like that for a sinner like you and this draws us to love him. He gave himself for us while we were worthy of condemnation.

Where did Christ display this great love? He displayed it at the cross. Look at verse 8 with me again as you see this emphasis at the cross and that's what we remember in Communion, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Christ died for us, died for believers in the sense that he died on our behalf and in our place. The stroke of judgment that should have fallen on us, he took, he felt, he absorbed. Christ, as it were, moved us aside and stood in our place at the cross of Calvary so that the judgment of God would fall on him and not on us, and Scripture says that this was a once-for-all sacrifice. Perfect. Complete. Everything necessary to accomplish your redemption was done by Christ and done at the cross and he displayed the love of God by giving his innocent life to save us from judgment.

So with a sense of sobriety, with a sense of joy, with a sense of earnestness, we remember who has acted on our behalf, it was the God of righteousness. We remember what Christ displayed at the cross, it was his own love. We remember when he displayed it, it was while we were yet sinners. And we remember where he displayed it, it was at the cross. So in light of those things, beloved, the Lord calls us through his word to take Communion in a worthy manner.

Let me just circle back. If you're not a Christian, we would ask you to respect the Lord enough to let the elements pass by. This is only for those who have received him as Lord, not for those who push him away. If you're a believer in sin, this kind of brings you to a crossroads, doesn't it? There is time for you now as the elements are being distributed to confess and to repent from the Lord and to take the elements with joy with a fresh sense of his forgiveness. If you claim Christ and yet you're not willing to confess your sin and to forsake it, you too should let the elements pass by. This is for those who are responding to Christ in sincerity, not in perfection, in sincerity of heart that says, "Yes, I trust in Christ and I want my life to be right before him."

Finally, if you are walking with Christ, you have been born again, you are trusting Christ and you're walking with him not in perfection but in the light of his word, let me invite you to take these elements with joy, with a sense of gratitude remembering who, what, when and where this all represents and to recognize that this is a token of a greater reality that points you to your eternal home in heaven.

With that, let's bow together in prayer as we pray.

Father, we thank you for the love of Christ displayed at the cross of Calvary. We fear you, we honor you as a God of righteousness. We thank you that in love Christ interceded on our behalf and that because he has fully paid the price of our sin, because his perfect righteousness is applied to our account, that we have a perfect standing with you that gives us access and acceptance before the holy throne of God. Help us to take these elements now in a worthy manner with gratitude, with joy, with a sense of worship. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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