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Series: Communion

Title: The Ultimate Object Lesson

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

As you know, since we started Upward basketball about 10 years ago, I have always served as the assistant coach for one of the teams. This year my team is the Panthers. Here's a shot of my guys. Here they are in action.

The Panthers are five and six-year-old boys, and I've served with older teams, but this is my favorite age group. I mean, at five or six they are too young for my lack of athletic talent to do any real damage to their basketball skill set---plus the things they say always make me laugh.

For example, one of our boys is named Fred Jones. Fred has been on my Upward team twice now, so I know his family. Fred's father is the pastor of a church start in Rockville. And the other day as we were beginning the mid-practice huddle---our weekly devotional time---I told Fred he was a "P.K." He asked what that meant, and I said, *"You're a preacher's kid. Your dad is a preacher, so you're a P.K. And by the way, my dad was a preacher, so I'm a P.K. too."* Fred thought for a minute. Then he looked up at me and said, *"But you're not a kid."*

The truth hurts, doesn't it!?

One of my tasks as an assistant coach is to lead these mid-practice devotional times and I've learned that my boys respond best to object lessons---something they can SEE that illustrates the truth I'm trying to get into their little heads. I mean, if I just talk for more than 10 seconds their attention drifts elsewhere, but when I SHOW them something, they are all eyes and ears.

This past week the devotional was on self-control. We talked about how self-control is important in basketball---and in life. The example from life that I used was our speech. I said it's important for us to learn to control what we say because in the same way we lose control over a basketball once it leaves our hands, we lose control over our words once they leave our mouths. As an object lesson, I brought a can of room deodorizer and gave it a few squirts and then told them to put all the stuff I squirted back in the can. They of course realized that was impossible and I said, *"Gossip is like that. Once you share gossip---you can't get it back."*

Another week the devotional was based on the story Jesus told about the wise and foolish builders. I brought in pictures of houses that obviously had bad foundations and their eyes were glued to those crumbling homes. I told them, that's what a life is like that is not founded on the Word of God. I know they paid attention because two weeks later one of the kids asked if I had any more pictures of crumbling houses to show.

Well, you and I may be older, but we are still much like my Upward team in that we learn truth best when we can SEE it, FEEL it, TASTE it. I guess it's part of our fallen nature because without some memory tool, as time goes by, we tend to forget more than we remember.

The Greeks of Jesus' day knew this. In fact, they described "time" as a "sponge" or an "eraser." They said time is, "that which wipes all things out." They realized that the human mind is much like a slate and time is the sponge or eraser that wipes it clean. One way to help counteract the effects of time on our memory is through the use of object lessons. And throughout Scripture we see God using this tactic with His people. In Deuteronomy 6, He commanded the Hebrew people to remember all of His law by writing a portion of it on a

small piece of paper and placing the paper in little boxes or phylacteries and tying this contraption to their foreheads or wrists. Some Jews still do that.

Jesus used object lessons too.

For example, there is the time He pointed to a grape vineyard and said, ***“I am the TRUE VINE.”*** ***“Stay connected to Me and you’ll bear much fruit!”*** After He miraculously fed the 5,000, He said, ***“I am the BREAD of life.”*** ***“I will satisfy the deepest hunger of your soul!”*** He was using an object lesson when He looked down into a well and told a thirsty woman, ***“I am the LIVING WATER.”*** ***“The forgiveness I offer---the relationship with God that you long for---I can satisfy that thirst!”***

And today we gather around this table because of something that Jesus did on the Thursday night before His arrest and crucifixion. As Jesus ate with His disciples, as He conversed with them around that table, He took an OLD object lesson---the Passover Meal---and changed it, fulfilled it, so you and I would learn and remember vitally important truth. Remember? As they began the meal, Jesus, Who is THE Passover Lamb, took some bread and as He broke it He said,

“This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ***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.”***

Before we partake, let’s remind ourselves of the truth that is conveyed in this---the ULTIMATE object lesson. What is it designed to teach us?

(1) It teaches us about Jesus’ DEATH.

As Paul puts it in 1st Corinthians 11:26 whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, ***“we remember the Lord’s death.”*** So, one purpose of this meal is to remind us that Jesus died on the cross for us.

If you’ve been to the Holy Land then you know that every place Jesus did a miracle, there is a church or two or three. I mean everywhere you look there are physical memorials to something Jesus said or did. Well, Jesus didn’t build those memorials. Whenever He performed a miracle He never said, ***“Build an altar here so you won’t forget this. Or carve a statue so you’ll remember this.”*** No, in fact He often did just the opposite. Frequently Jesus said, ***“Don’t tell anyone about this---don’t memorialize this.”***

But His death was different. He constantly referred to it as the high hour of His life---as if it were the sole purpose of His coming to earth---as if it were the one hour of His life for which all other hours existed. Obviously, Jesus did not want us to forget His death.

That’s what He was doing with the Passover Meal. He took that meal---that object lesson---intended to remind the Hebrews how God protected them from the death angel---and fulfilled it---used it to help us remember how He saved us from our sin and the death that comes because of it. The broken bread we will share in a moment reminds us that Jesus’ body was broken on the cross, the nails that pierced His hands and feet, the spear that tore open His side, Jesus’ body was broken in those ways so that we could be made whole, forgiven, restored. That bread reminds us that Jesus suffered and DIED in our place.

The cup represents Jesus’ blood---shed to wash away our sin. As God’s Word says,

- ***“We are justified through His blood”*** (Romans 5:9);
- ***“We have redemption through His blood”*** (Ephesians 1:7);
- ***“We have peace with God through His blood”*** (Colossians 1:20)

- and ***“The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.”*** (1st John 1:7)

It is as the old hymn says, *“There is power in the blood of the Lamb!”*

But please understand. Jesus did not shed His precious blood ONLY to CLEANSE us from our sin. He did it so we can be FREED from our sin. Through His blood---His death on the cross---Jesus broke the power sin has over us.

- Do you struggle with lustful thoughts? You can be set free, because Jesus paid the price for that freedom with his blood.
- Do you struggle with controlling your temper? You can be set free, because Jesus paid the price for it.
- Do you struggle with lying, or gossip, or bitterness, or envy, or anger, or jealousy?

You can be set free from all those things, because Jesus paid the price for your freedom with his blood. As Andre Crouch’s song puts it *“The blood that gives me strength from day to day will never lose its power.”* Because Jesus shed His blood on the cross, if we ask Him, He forgives us of our sin and comes to live inside our hearts---giving us the POWER to say NO to sin.

So, this object lesson---this bread and cup---they remind us that the salvation, the freedom we enjoy as Christians is not free. It cost Jesus His life---so this meal we are about to share is not something we take casually.

This week I came across a list of *“The World’s Most Expensive Meals.”* Here are some of the entrees that appeared:

- At the Fijimake Gekijyo restaurant in Tokyo you can get this bowl of Ramen for \$110.
- The Capital Dawg in Sacramento, California serves up this, “The Ultra-Dog,” the world's most expensive hot dog at \$145.99.
- In Scotland you can order a bottle of this “End of History” beer, Belgian ale packaged inside taxidermied squirrel carcasses for \$1,000 per bottle.
- At \$2,000 a slice (or \$16,000 per pie) you can enjoy this Britain's Wagyu Meat Pie and its savory combination of six pounds of Kobe beef and matsutake mushrooms.
- And in Italy, Chef Viola's “Louis XIII” pizza, loaded with lobster, caviar, eight different types of cheese, and seasoned with hand-picked pink Australian river salt, sells for \$12,000.

Well, the price of all those “meals” pales in comparison to the price of the one we are about to share---for it is a reminder that Jesus DIED so we could LIVE. That’s the PRICE of our forgiveness. Jesus became poor so we could become rich. He laid aside the rights of deity so that He might become our Servant. He gave up perfection to become sin for us. He died---so that we can live. Communion reminds us that our Holy God sent His only Son to die for sinful people like You and me.

That leads us to a second thing we can learn from this, the ULTIMATE object lesson.

(2) It reminds us of our SIN.

Communion is a time for us to remember that we ARE fallen beings---that Romans 3:23 applies to each of us---that ***“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”*** We all need the forgiveness that only Jesus’ death and resurrection has made possible. As the famous religious journalist Charles Clayton Morrison once said, *“The church is the only institution in the world whose membership is based on unworthiness to be a member.”*

We are not perfect people. We do not gather at this Lord's Table because we deserve to do so. No, we are recipients of grace — undeserved love So, as Paul puts it in 1st Corinthians 11:28-29

“Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.”

Communion is a time for us to remember the importance of daily confession of sin---and repentance from it.

Pastor Rod Cooper shares,

“After I graduated from Dallas Seminary, waiting on my first ministry, I went home to live with my mother. My mom gave me chores. She said, ‘One of your jobs is to take out the trash, Son.’

So, every week I put out the garbage. One week I forgot to put out the garbage. Garbage has a way of making itself known. It began to smell. Every day we kept piling more garbage onto it. It even began to spill over, and it was right where you came into the back of the house. Every time we went into the house, we would get a whiff of it. The aroma began to seep into the house and infected the atmosphere. Then it started to infect my mom's relationship with me. Every time she looked at me, it was as if she were saying, ‘Why don't you take out the garbage?’ The next week, I took out the garbage. The atmosphere cleaned up. Our relationship was better. Everything was okay.”

When we fail to confess our sin to God, it infects our relationship with Him. Communion is a reminder of this-- a reminder of our need to keep the relationship with God that Jesus' death made possible---in good shape. It's a reminder of the importance of confessing our sins daily to God for if we do, ***“He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***

Here's something else we should learn from the ultimate object lesson---communion.

(3) It helps us experience Jesus' PRESENCE.

You see, whenever we observe communion, we are not remembering a dead man. This service is not a wake — Jesus is not some distant memory. No, He is our living Lord. When we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we are celebrating the fact that He is with us here now and always.

You know there are various views on the meaning and interpretation of the Lord's Supper.

Catholics believe in what they call “TRANSUBSTANTIATION.” This is the belief that when a person partakes of the supper, the Lord performs a miracle and actually changes the bread into the actual body of Jesus and the wine into the actual blood of Jesus.

Episcopalians and Lutherans believe in a thing called “CONSUBSTANTIATION.” This is the belief that the Holy Spirit is present with the bread and the cup and gives them unusual powers of blessing. Theirs is not the same belief as Catholics but it's not far from it.

However, as Baptists, we look at this ordinance as being purely symbolic. It's an OBJECT lesson. We believe that this bread and cup are a symbol of the death of Jesus on our behalf. We believe that there is no saving power either in the Lord's Supper or in Baptism. They are both pictures of Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, you could say that the truth of the whole of the gospel story is crowded into these two ordinances. But, even though it is symbolic, we do believe that in a very real sense we meet the Lord at this table. Whenever we eat of this bread and drink from this cup we do so to remember that Jesus is here now in this place.

Do you remember the experience those two disciples had as they walked on the Road to Emmaus after Jesus' crucifixion? Jesus appeared to them and walked with them but blinded by their grief, they did not recognize

Him until He sat down at the table with them to eat...and as He blessed the bread and broke it---as He did at the first Lord's Supper---their eyes were opened and they knew Him. When He was gone from their midst they said to each other, ***"Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?"*** (Luke 24:32)

Well, in a similar way, our hearts burn with His presence as we come to His table today to break bread and drink from the cup. Whenever we do so we both experience Jesus' presence now and remember that He is always with us just as He promised He would be. Communion connects us with Jesus---Who died in our place.

I can't help but think of this famous painting of the Vietnam Wall. A man, a Vietnam vet, has apparently stopped by the wall on his way home from work and he's reaching out to the wall---touching the names of his fellow soldiers who died in that horrible conflict. The painting shows a reflection of those soldiers reaching out their hands to touch his. The wall connects them.

Well, that's what the Lord's Supper is like. We come to the table and reach out our hands to take this unleavened bread and this fruit of the vine and as we do---Jesus reaches right back. We share a special COMMUNION with our Savior whenever we share this meal. It's as if He says to each of us, ***"This bread...this cup...My body...My blood---are for you."***

There's one more thing this---the ultimate object lesson---is meant to teach us.

(4) You see, whenever we come to this table, we not only look back to the cross and we not only look up to His presence---we also look forward to His RETURN.

Remember Paul's words in 1st Corinthians? He said, ***"As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do remember the Lord's death until He come."*** As Kevin reminded us a few weeks back, we have not seen the last of Jesus Christ. He will come again.

In John 14 He promised, ***"I go to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am."*** So, you see, the Lord's Supper is a symbol not just of a meal that happened 2,000 years ago but also of one that will occur when Jesus returns. When Jesus comes back Revelation 19:9 says that we will all sit down to enjoy ***"the wedding supper of the Lamb."*** We'll gather with our loves ones who have passed away, we'll be reunited with them and our Lord and we will rejoice and be glad. Imagine what it will be like to gather around THAT table!

As we partake this morning, let us be sure to remember all these things: Jesus' death, our sin and the forgiveness Jesus made possible---His presence...and His promised return.

It is our tradition here at Redland to invite ALL CHRISTIANS to share in this meal. So even if you are not a member of this church---if you are a Christian, please join us.

THE ORDINANCE OF COMMUNION

You know I am thankful that when we worship together here at Redland. For in essence, worship is an object lesson---and God always uses OUR worship to teach me. I mean, it is never just another Sunday around here. God always teaches me something new. Whenever I gather here with you wonderful people, God always shows me some new way that I need to grow.

Perhaps this morning He has done something like that for you. Maybe today God has nudged your heart and mind in such a way that you know realize you need to respond. You understand that this is not just another

Sunday for you rather it is a moment of truth that you can accept or reject. Some of you may feel this is the day you need to join this church. God has called you to join us in the work He is doing in this place. Others may feel this is the day you need to respond to God's call in your life in some special way. And some of you may have come to that all-important time in life when you decide to actually give your life to God. You are ready to take that step of faith and believe that Jesus died for your sin. You want to invite Him into your heart and life. If any of these decisions apply to you then I invite you to do something that will help you never forget this decision. Walk forward and share it with me and this entire church....make your decision public. Won't you come and do this as we sing?