

Stop Going to Church – Communion

2/26/23

Acts 2:42-47 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-31

Sunday AM

The evangelist, **D. L. Moody** was once visiting a prominent Chicago citizen when the topic of church membership/engagement came up. Noticeably, the man got defensive and said, "I believe I can be just as good a Christian outside the church as I can be inside it." To which Mr. Moody, saying nothing, stood up and walked across the room toward the burning fireplace – where he took the fireplace tongs and removed a lump of burning coal from the fire onto the hearth. Then, for the next few min., sat w/ the man as they watched the ember grow cold/faint – and upon the ember dying out, the man said to Mr. Moody, "I now understand."

Two weeks ago, we started a series leading up to our 50th church anniversary – ***Stop Going to Church***.

And the reason to stop going to church is simple – it's b/c ***God never intended for us to go to church*** – b/c from the start, He's only wanted us to **BE** His church.

SEE – God's highest calling on our lives was never for us to just walk into a church building, shake a few hands, sing 3-4 songs, listen to a sermon, and leave. His calling is for us to be conformed to the image of Christ – *together*, to walk w/ the H.S. in an abiding life – *together*, and to **BE** His church by being His hands, feet, and voice to the world around us – *together*.

This has always been, and will forever be God's purpose for His church no matter how far away we may have ventured into some watered-down, feel-good, entertain-me, tickle-your-ears gathering.

So, it is w/ great confidence, compassion, and concern that I can say – ***Jesus started the church the way He wanted it, and now He wants it the way He started it.***

To refresh your memory, God started the church on the day of Pentecost 50 days after the crucifixion of Jesus. The H.S. descended upon the disciples and all-heaven broke loose. Peter testified and over 3,000+ people accepted Jesus as Savior – ***and the church was born.***

As a result of this miraculous moment, **Acts 2:42-47** offers us (5) ***essential qualities*** the church had in the beginning, that God still wants for His church today.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled w/ awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together w/ glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

We learn from this text that the early church was all-in together, ***devoted (all for one and one for all)***, to (1) the apostle's teachings, (2) to *koinonia*, (3) to the breaking of bread, (4) to prayer, and (5) to seeing what God was going to do next in, thru, and among them.

In the first (2) weeks we've looked at what it means to be devoted to the *apostle's teaching* and to *koinonia* – today I want us to delve into what it means that they were devoted to the ***breaking of bread.***

The simple answer is the **breaking of bread** refers to the people regularly partaking in the Lord's Supper in corporate worship to **rejoice** in their salvation, to **remember** the work of Christ on the cross that saved them, to accept God's commission to **retell** the story of His loving grace, and to **reflect** on their lives to ensure they were living aligned w/ God's Word/will.

Which infers (2) essential truths that are often lost on Christians and the church today:

1 – While faith is **PERSONAL**; it's never **PRIVATE**.

God's intention has always been that we come to Him individually by grace thru faith, but we live out our faith together in community. Why? We need one another to run the race of life, and to encourage each other along the way so that we can make it across the finish line. We need each other *to spur one another along toward love and good deeds*.

2 – While faith is **PUBLIC**; it's always **PERSONAL**.

While we're called to something greater than ourselves – God still has a special calling/design on our lives He wants us to experience as we seek first His Kingdom/righteousness. So, while I have a duty to you and you to me to help one another along the way, we're also culpable for our own walks/relationship w/ God as we daily seek to know/walk w/ Him.

All this to say, both public/private worship are critical to having a faith that works. **Each one feeds the other.** *Our private worship incites our public worship and our public worship feeds our private worship.*

We know from Acts 2 that public/private worship should include God's Word, praising, interaction, and prayer, but there's one thing reserved solely for public worship – ***the breaking of bread***. So, this AM, I want to discuss the importance/relevance of communion.

For I received from the Lord what I now share w/ you: the Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed, took bread – and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, He took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood – do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body/blood of the Lord. So, let a man examine himself, and let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats/drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many are weak/sick among you, and some have died. For if we would judge ourselves, we'd not be judged. But when we're judged, we're chastened by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned w/ the world. 1 Corinthians 11:23-31

I believe there are (4) primary reasons for corporate worship centered around the Lord's Supper.

I An Occasion for **REJOICING**

When we gather every Sunday, it's to be a time for all of us together to celebrate, praise, and thank the Lord for His amazing love/grace for each of us. It's a time of singing, testifying, interceding, and growing in our faith w/ one another as we **hallow** His name.

Several yrs. ago, I shared a message on worship about what it meant to **hallow** the name of God together.

Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said, 'I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be hallowed.'" Leviticus 10:3

To **hallow** means to lift up the name of God in praise and adoration so His name might be honored/glorified.

Meaning, individually/corporately, from a grateful heart, we're to set His name in the highest place so that we never lose sight of who He is or what He has done.

And it gets better. In Hebrew corporate worship, the people we're called to *hallow* His name in (7) ways:

Yadah – to worship w/ outstretched held high

Halal – to celebrate w/ dancing and cheering

Zamar – to make music (as in playing instruments)

Todah – to lift hands and clap in gratitude

Barak – to humbly kneel in adoration/dependence

Tehillah – to break out in loud singing

Shabach – to shout in triumph to magnify

These are the actions of corporate worship – meaning *worship is to be a fully-immersed, full-contact sport.*

II A Time of **REMEMBRANCE**

We gather together around God's Word and the cross to remember the greatest truth in the world – *that God so loved us that He gave His life for us* – so we could be *rescued, redeemed, and reconciled* to Him!

Meaning the cross/empty tomb should be our focus every Sunday no matter the sermon topic – as we give thanks to God for His mercy/grace found in Christ.

Hence, the early church regularly practiced partaking in communion – apparently every time they gathered. Even living so close to the actual event of His sacrifice, they never wanted to forget what He did on the cross b/c they understood its importance.

III A Commission to **RETELLING**

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes.*

Every time we gather, we're not just remembering, but we're also proclaiming and being reminded of our commission to **go and tell** – *to go and live* the truth of the resurrection where we live, work, and play.

The beauty of the G.C. is Jesus took what was a *come-and-see* approach reliant on the religious leaders – and gave it to all of His followers in a go-and-tell mandate.

Meaning – the G.C. has been entrusted to each of us as we go into our world. We're to be salt that seasons and preserves, and light that shines to point people to the same love, mercy, and grace that we've been fortunate to have discovered b/c someone told us.

It's important to remember that our calling is to convey the message as God leads. It's the H.S.'s job to convict, convince, cajole, and convert. Our calling is to be a willing conduit of God's grace that thru us the H.S. can do what only He can do to transform lives.

IV A Need for **REFLECTION**

Finally, when we gather for worship, it's to be a time of **reflection** on our intimacy w/ God and w/ one another. It's to be a time of self-examination to ensure that our *attitudes, appetites, ambitions, and actions* to God-centered and not self-centered.

It's a time to focus on *confession, repentance, and alignment* – where we not only make sure we're right w/ God, but that we're also right w/ one another.

Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body/blood of the Lord. So, let a man examine himself, and let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats/drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many are weak/sick among you, and some have died. For if we would judge ourselves, we'd not be judged. But when we're judged, we're chastened by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned w/ the world.

All this to say, communion/corporate worship are serious business. It's not a *come, sit, listen, and leave* event – it's a *come, rejoice, remember, retell, and reflect* engagement where we give God and each other all that we are to all that He is to bring hope, encouragement, and surrender to the will of God to keep each other burning brightly.