

## **Communion in Biblical Perspective: Jesus' Dinner Plans**

**I Corinthians 11:23-25**

**By [Mark Cushman](#)**

*October 31, 2010 – Evening Sermon*

We are in for a marvelous evening as we come to the Lord's Table to fellowship with Him and to fellowship with each other. It's interesting how important meetings in our lives are often done over tables of fellowship and meals we enjoy. I remember a number of years ago, in my last year of college where I traveled to a different state to check out a seminary or graduate school I was considering attending. When I arrived there was large music festival and I hadn't realized that the main speaker was a man named Paul Little who was one of my favorite authors. I had read a number of his books some called Know Why You Believe, Know What You Believe and How To Give Away Your Faith. These books had meant a lot to me and I finally realized he was the speaker so after one of the musical sessions I saw him in the seminary cafeteria eating alone. So I went and asked if I could join him for lunch and we sat there for about 30 minutes and talked. He shared a lot about the seminary where he was teaching and it wasn't in Kentucky where I was but it was up in Chicago. After about 30 minutes my plans had all changed and I was headed for Chicago for school. It was a very momentous meal.

I remember less than a year later came at the Choo Choo Restaurant in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I was there in my sweaty clothes and I met with a man named James Caldwell Westin. It was a very important meeting because I had proposed to his daughter three days before. Unbeknownst to me she had set up this meeting after that and called me and said, "My dad is coming through Chattanooga and he wants to meet with you." I was terrified. I happened to be in a little interim job pushing laundry carts there before I went on to graduate school and lo and behold I had to meet hopefully my future father in law. We met and he was very gracious and overlooked the fact that I was very young and didn't have a job but said I could marry his daughter with the one admonition saying "While you're at school Mark, don't have babies." We didn't obey that one. We had one before we graduated but that was another important occasion in my life over a meal.

Likewise it was a few years later in a Holiday Inn in Georgia where I met with a small group of people that were very interested in calling me as their first pastor.

These people had been in the PCA and been in a church. After we ate a wonderful meal I stood up in front of the group and for a while they just pummeled me with questions. I must have answered enough of them accurately because they got together and voted and called me as their pastor which introduced a relationship that lasted for 20 years. It turned out to be a great blessing. All three of those occasions were extremely important and were made over a meal.

In many ways though, all those meals were somewhat forgettable. The menus certainly were because if you ask me today what I ate on those three occasions in Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia, I have no idea what I ate. Likewise the reasons were strictly personal. CBS News didn't show up to interview me and they didn't care what I was doing. The reasons were strictly personal. I wanted a school to go to. I wanted a wife and I wanted a job. So sure enough I received the answers to my prayers but in the long course of human events they are not really terribly important reasons. The results of those meetings were also very limited. They will have some extended results but those meetings produced instance results and those were a blessing to my family and I hope to those people in that church in Georgia but when I pass along the scenes the influence will begin to wane and by God's grace there will be some indirect influences in the years to come. By in large in the course of human events the results will be limited from those meals but at the same time the Lord was in them.

This brings to mind Howard Hendricks' favorite statement that many of you know. He said "If you want to know how significant you are just take a bowl of water and plunge your hand into it and pull it out. In the space that's left is how significant you are." Those meals were important to me but in the course of human events they will probably not be going to be important to much of anybody.

Tonight we come to a meal that is entirely different. We come to a meal that is astonishingly important. We don't often recognize that. Because of repetition we do this routinely but this meal is of towering importance. We are going to look at the text that Pastor Reeder often uses as we look at this Table in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 which says, 23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also 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." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Here is the reading of God's Word.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we open Your Word and come to Your Table tonight we ask that You will bless us as indeed You will. We rejoice in Your Word and they are familiar words, we've heard them taught, preached and have read them many times. I pray by Your Spirit that You might use the words of Your servant

that You might open our eyes and hearts to hear again these wonderful admonitions that draw us to Your Table, a Table of far more significance than any table we might come in contact with in our individual lives because You're there and we thank You and pray this in Jesus' Name and for His sake, Amen.

If you look at this passage it's remarkable in the amount of content that's here. We could spend hours plumbing the depths. In fact many of you have heard Pastor Reeder speak on this passage a number of times and it's remarkable the insights, the background and the depth that we see here. Unfortunately we're not going to spend a long time this evening with it but I'd love to make some observations from it, first, in the introduction that the Apostle Paul brings and then some insights that we might learn from Jesus' intent in bringing us to this Table.

Right away you can look at these Words and realize that you're dealing with three very special things. The first is a very special invitation. The Apostle Paul in this passage says in 1 Corinthians 11:23a *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you..."* This is not a liturgy that the Apostle Paul has invented to give the church an opportunity to minister. There are many things we do and create to enhance worship and we're given the ability to do that and permission from Scripture in terms of our forms of worship but this was not something that came from the Apostle Paul. It was an invitation that came from the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an invitation that Paul is passing along to us. In other words the Apostle Paul here is just a mail carrier, if you will. He is passing along this message to us at Briarwood from the Creator of the Universe because He desires to have you come to His Table tonight. It's not the Apostle Paul's table. It's Jesus' Table and when you walk out tonight and see that clear October night and see those stars you'll know and recall that it is He who placed those stars there that invited me to this dinner tonight. It's a very special invitation.

It's also a very special circumstance. The Apostle Paul gives us this note that says *"on the night that He was betrayed"* (1 Corinthians 11:23) and that reminds us that it is a chronological observation because it was the day before the Sabbath when the disciples were meeting together before Jesus went to the cross, but isn't it interesting that He said it was the night that He was betrayed? I believe that is very intentional. The Apostle Paul wants us to remember that Judas was at that Table that Judas was about to receive these elements – the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus. You would say that he would eat the body and blood that he would betray. It's an awesome thing to think that just because we come doesn't mean we come rightly.

In fact, a few verses down in that same chapter Paul probably has Judas in mind when he speaks about being very careful when we come to the Table to discern the Lord's body because it's a Table that's very powerful and we need to be very careful as we come. We need to realize that unfortunately we should never come with unrepentant hearts like Judas did. This was the night when Jesus was

betrayed. I don't believe Judas was saved and this is certainly not a table for non-Christians but sometimes even you and I can come with hardened unrepentant hearts and we need to be very careful. The amazing thing is this is a Table for sinners. Even though it was the night that He was betrayed, representing all that was about to happen, He still fed His body and blood to these disciples. What an amazing grace that you and I can come to this Table to enjoy the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was a very special invitation and a very special circumstance.

Thirdly, it's also a very special obedience. The Apostle Paul says, "And when He had given thanks..." (1 Corinthians 11:24a). Think of the context here. The other gospels speak of it as a little bit more than a blessing but it's characterized by Jesus giving thanks for a broken body and body that would shed blood. What a picture of obedience that is. It resonates with Philippians 2:8 which says "*And being found in human form, he (Jesus) humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Yet how was His faith manifested? It was when He paused before the breaking of His body and the pouring of His blood, in that Lord's Supper and He gave thanks.

I find one of the greatest examples of faith is when in the midst of trial and tribulation God's people are still giving thanks for what's happening in their circumstances. I have people asked me sometimes, "You see so much tough stuff in the hospital so how can you keep doing that as the pastor of Pastoral Care?" I say "You don't know how often I walk into rooms where there is real hurt and real pain and those believers are giving thanks for what God is doing and noticing the blessings that He is bringing in the midst of their tribulation and so often I leave just thoroughly blessed."

It's a treat to minister to many people that I do. Why? It is because when facing trial and tribulation they are still giving thanks because they serve a loving heavenly Father who's sovereign and Boss and working His purposes out. I believe that's what we find here. When Jesus pauses in this liturgy so to speak, and gives thanks it highlights His single-minded obedience to the heavenly Father.

That is what we find here. We find a special invitation, a special circumstance and a special obedience in Paul's introduction but then he focuses on the words of Jesus and we see a very unique intent that Jesus has. Years ago when I had those three meals that were very important to me they were forgettable and not something that will ever have a direct impact on your life. They were also somewhat limited because as I move off the scene and my family grows that direct impact will be long gone but with Jesus that's not the case. Consider the menu at the Table. I couldn't even tell you what was on the menu at those three meals that mentioned. Here I can tell you what the menu is. Here it is crucial. Jesus says "This is My body which is broken for you. This cup is the New

Covenant in My blood.” That’s quite a menu that you and I are about to share tonight.

The language here is way too direct for us to assume that these elements are just given to us by way of memorial or remembrance. Out in the foyer we have a pile of stones which is a wonderful remembrance or memorial of God’s blessings on this church for the last 50 years but that’s not what is going on here. These aren’t given as simply just a thing to remember or memorialize what Christ has done. On the other hand they are not given for us to think when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper that they become literally the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that because in the first century and this occasion what Paul is referring to Jesus is there and it would stretch human language and logic to bizarre means to assume that when Jesus was sitting there with His disciples He was saying that the juice or wine He was serving was literally His blood because He was there and He was alive.

On many occasions we find Jesus using similar symbolism. In John He said, “I am the Vine and you are the branches.” There is the time when He spoke of Himself as the Door. The church has never regarded Him as literally a vine or a door because that’s not what that imagery means. We understand that to be symbolic and likewise we see these symbols here of His body and blood as very important but we also see a very real presence, a spiritual presence. As John Calvin says “There’s a presence of His power here that is absolutely unique in our relationship with Him.” So it can be said in a spiritual sense we do eat of His body and we do drink of His blood in the most intimate and personal way that is really incomparable in other religions and a unique blessing for us as believers. The Creator of the Universe, the One who created the stars out here wants us to come and eat with Him and eat this unique menu because in this bread we receive, benefits of His body broken for us, broken for sin and in this cup we receive the covenant of which it is a pledge. When we draw together in fellowship as we eat these elements we grow in our spiritual strength, our assurance, our confidence and in our comfort as we relate and eat together. It’s a unique menu unlike you and I will ever enjoy.

Not only as we consider the menu we also consider the reason for coming. The reason for those meals years ago was strictly personal because as I said I wanted a job, a wife and an education. Here the issue is not about us. It’s not about me when I come to the Lord’s Table. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” We don’t do this to impress our family or the other members of the church that are here or to even nourish our souls primarily but we do this to remember Him, to draw close to Him. We are in communion with Him. In fact, Charles Hodge says that this is the specific definite object of the Lord’s Supper and that is to remember Him.

Years ago there was a little plaque saying that circulated and I think we had it written on a couple of pieces of wood around our house. The saying goes like

this; "If God seems far away, guess who moved?" You may recall that what it is getting at is that sometimes you and I will feel a little distant from God. Our relationship with Him is not as sharp or powerful and it's a little simplistic way of saying the problem isn't with God. He's not the One who has moved away from us. It's us. Our sin has alienates us from Him and Satan loves to see us feel that He is no watching or as close as He used to be.

Here we have a remarkably God given antidote to that trend that you and I experience when we sin and begin to feel distant from God. What a unique remedy to say that we can come back in the most remarkable way. We can come back to Him and fellowship in a very intimate meal and partake spiritually of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is such a sweet psychologically needed if you will, remedy. God is so providential in providing this unique way for drawing us back to Himself. We all need to be drawn back periodically as our relationship needs to be renewed and restored and such is tonight.

So we come in a very tangible way to remember Him. We come to remember His sinless life, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His soon return, and this isn't even just about spiritual nourishment. We come to come back to Jesus and that's what you will have in just a few moments and that's the opportunity to come to Him. We will enjoy this together. You need to take some time to meditate on some Scripture and use this time valuably. This isn't the time to contemplate what you're going to do tomorrow because you'll have plenty of time later to do that. Get alone in your thoughts. Read some Scripture that is there in front of you and prepare to come back to Jesus as we need to tonight.

We consider the menu. We consider the reason and we can also consider the result. What should happen as a result? The Apostle Paul helps us by saying "We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." We do not come primarily to satisfy hunger or to impress others or to even to impress God but we come to proclaim His death. We come to bear the testimony to the body and blood of Christ when we use the nourishment we gain to preserve and propagate or proclaim the meaning of what these elements represent. That's a little statement I drew from various sources and I want to say it again because we need to understand that when we leave here, what's Jesus' point is? What does He want us to do? What is the Apostle Paul trying to emphasize with these words? We come to bear the testimony to the body and blood of Christ when we use the nourishment we gain to preserve and propagate the meaning of what these elements represent. That is the Gospel.

We are leaving here nourished to proclaim the Gospel of Christ of His death and resurrection, of the Gospel that is needed by people around us. This Supper is designed not only to revive our hearts but to change the world out there. God is using this to nourish us, to comfort us, to strengthen us, but it's not about us alone. It's about a lost and needy world. It's about a time to say "Lord, I need to come back to You so I can be the kind of person You want me to be out where I

live and work.” So in a very real way that world out there that generation beyond the walls of Briarwood should be remarkable beneficiaries of what we do here. We proclaim the Lord’s death and we do it until He returns. That perpetual thing until He returns is what this is about.

The meals I had several years ago were very limited in their impact. This meal is not meant to be limited at all. I can use a very feeble illustration and I apologize for it but back in High School I ran cross country. Occasionally before big races we would gather as a team and we would go to a restaurant and we would do some carb loading. If you’re a runner you might understand what I mean. This meant we would have a great time eating carbohydrates like spaghetti, lasagna, etc. It wasn’t an instant energy source but it would get into your system and by the time you ran the next morning or afternoon in theory you’re supposed to benefit from those extra carbs and I was amazed at what carbs a team of cross country runners could put away. We all believed that had an impact the next. We’re not carb loading here but let me encourage you that what goes on here should have an impact on you tomorrow. That’s what the Apostle Paul wants to emphasize when he says “We proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”

I can promise you that when you leave here tonight you will proclaim something by the shows we watch, by the words we use, by the attitude we share, by the people we talk to and what we say. We will be proclaiming something. The question I challenge you with tonight is, what will we be proclaiming? Will it come from a hardened heart, a rebellious heart or will we be proclaiming from a heart that has been warmed, a heart that has been nourished and comforted, a heart that leaves this room prepared to proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes? Let’s prepare our hearts as we pray.

Prayer:

Father I thank You so much that this meal is not just about us getting what we want but Lord, it’s about You receiving what You deserve. So we come with hearts that are prepared but at the same time it’s a Table about giving the world what it desperately needs. Lord, I pray that our hearts will leave this place giving You the praise, the glory, the honor and proclaiming what You desire us to proclaim that You may give us wisdom in some tough relationships that You may give us the words to say and the attitude to hold that You will give us help in some difficult decisions that You will help us to make those decisions in a way that will reflect upon Christ in our hearts that husbands and wives will leave here with renewed hunger to live lovingly together and to parent children as wisely as possible that we all may proclaim Christ in His glory. I pray Lord as we come and eat tonight that You would use this for Your glory in us and this we pray in Jesus’ Name and for His sake, Amen.

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