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Sermon Notes

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The Lord's Supper: A Spiritual Encounter with the Living God

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

I. Holy Ground

A very long time ago, an obscure man was tending sheep in the desert. He was old—eighty years old—and the sheep weren't even his. He led them to the far side of the desert, to a mountain where he hoped to find pasture and water. As he ascended the mountain, he suddenly saw a sight for which there was no earthly explanation. He saw a shrub on fire, but as he watched, he observed that it was a fire the likes of which he had never seen in his life. The fire was raging, he could hear the crackle of it and the dancing flames, but the bush was not consumed. The bush's leaves were unharmed, its small branches unchanged. This was a wonder, and his natural curiosity was aroused. Forgetting the sheep for a moment, he turned aside to have a closer look at this amazing thing.

Suddenly, he heard the voice that would change his life. It spoke clearly and powerfully from the midst of the burning bush: "DO NOT COME ANY CLOSER! Take off your sandals, for the ground on which you are standing is HOLY GROUND."

Then the voice identified himself: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

When he heard this, this old man—Moses—hid his face and did not dare to look upon God.

This was how God called Moses from tending the sheep of his father in law, Jethro, to leading the Jewish nation from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. Amazingly, however, though the Exodus journey and the final destination are worthy of eternal consideration, nothing is more important than the personal encounter of Almighty God with individual human souls. Any Jew that made the journey but did not have an encounter by faith with the God

who appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush ended up dead in the desert.

So what does it mean THE GROUND ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND? How can each of us come to the same experience, of standing in the presence of the creator of the universe and not being consumed by the fire of his holiness?

This is a great mystery. We are taught in scripture that God is OMNIPRESENT... that there is nowhere in the universe in which God does not fully exist with all of his attributes:

Psalm 139:7-10 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

Jesus Christ made this even more plain in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. The Jews and Samaritans had debated for centuries about the proper place of worship, where people should make pilgrimages and worship. The Jews said it was in Jerusalem, the Samaritans claimed it was on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria. Jesus revealed something about the changes he was about to bring in the New Covenant... no longer would there be any designated place to travel and worship:

John 4:21-24 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

But God has ALWAYS been omnipresent, and so even in the days of Moses, what did it mean that Moses was standing on HOLY GROUND? Why was that ground HOLY and 1/4 of a mile away was not holy?

We could ask the same thing of Jacob, when he woke up on the ground, where he'd been sleeping with a rock for a pillow. Jacob was fleeing for his life from his enraged brother Esau, and lay down bone weary on an obscure patch of ground between Beersheba and Haran. As he lay asleep there, his head was filled with an astonishing dream, with fiery and powerful images: he saw a

stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching up to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above the stairway stood the Lord and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac." God promised to give to Jacob and his descendants the land on which he was lying, and to greatly multiply his descendants so that they would spread out to the west, east, north, and south. And he promised him, "ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU AND YOUR OFFSPRING." He promised to be with him and to watch over him wherever he went.

When Jacob woke up from his sleep, he was filled with awe, stunned by the dream:

Genesis 28:16-17 He thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

So what is HOLY GROUND if God is omnipresent? I think it must be tied to OUR SENSE of God in the place... our EXPERIENCE of God... our RELATIONSHIP with God, at HIS INITIATIVE... a place in which God CHOOSES to reveal himself, to bring us closer, to pour his goodness into our souls

Psalms 138:6 Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.

He knows the proud "from afar"... what does that mean?

It must be similar to Jesus' terrifying statement on Judgment Day:

Matthew 7:23 I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

He, the Judge of all the earth, knows everything about them! He knows even in that statement that they are EVILDOERS. But he knows far more than that... he knows every careless word they have ever spoken, and he will judge them for those words and actions. BUT he still says, "I never knew you!"

The omniscient God knows ABOUT everybody, but he only KNOWS those whom he chooses and draws close into a covenant relationship with himself through Christ.

So it is with HOLY GROUND. God is everywhere. But he is specially and intimately and powerfully found in places he chooses; there he reveals himself directly to faith-filled hearts in a memorable way.

Jesus was not saying to the Samaritan woman that there will never again be “holy ground”... but instead that God, who is Spirit, can and will choose to reveal himself anywhere on the planet to people who draw close to him by faith.

So also in the New Covenant, there is no longer a physical temple or tabernacle... but the new “holy place” or even “most holy place” or “HOLY OF HOLIES” is the Body of Jesus Christ himself...

John 2:18-21 the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

Matthew 27:50-51 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.

So the author of Hebrews commands us to DRAW NEAR to God in a new HOLY PLACE or on new HOLY GROUND:

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

This is precisely where the Lord’s Supper comes in... by means of it, we can draw near to God, by recognizing the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ

In order to do this, we turn briefly to 1 Corinthians 11

The Corinthian Context:

- Talented, gifted church
- Split by divisions based on human pride
- Immature
- Dealing with doctrinal and practical problems...

In the midst of all these swirling issues, Paul takes up the topic of the way the Corinthians were celebrating the Lord's Supper

Reading the lines and between the lines, it seems that some of the Corinthians were acting very irreverently toward the ordinance of the Lord's Supper... behaving carnally, even getting DRUNK! So Paul dropped a theological bombshell about how SERIOUSLY God takes the Lord's Supper... it is New Covenant HOLY GROUND!!

1 Corinthians 11:27-30 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Astonishing!! The Lord takes this ordinance so seriously that He was willing to afflict some of His own people with illness and even with death because they had eaten and drunk in a manner unworthy of the Lord

So Paul, moved by compassion for them and moved by zeal for the Lord... really moved by the Spirit of the Lord Himself, wrote these verses to warn them to take the Lord's Supper very seriously, lest they be judged by taking it in a wrong manner

BUT MORE... that they may be blessed genuinely by the richness of the spiritual blessing the Lord intended by the Lord's Supper

SO ALSO FOR US TODAY!!

The Lord's Supper was meant to be a rich river of blessing for the church of Jesus Christ

But it has also been a source of immense controversy as well

Historical Context:

I was raised Roman Catholic, and we were taught that the bread and wine, through the miracle of transubstantiation, became the ACTUAL BODY and BLOOD of Jesus Christ, and that only by physically partaking from it could we be saved

Martin Luther, the great reformer of the 16th century, trembled so violently when he performed his first mass as a Catholic priest that he actually spilled the precious wine on the table; after he came to evangelical convictions, he still believed the bread and wine became in some sense the actual body and blood of Christ

Ulrich Zwingli, who lived at the same time and carried out a powerful reformation in Switzerland, so opposed the old Catholic ways that he rejected the significance of the Lord's Supper entirely and believed it to be merely a memorial, nowhere near as significant as the faithful preaching of the Word. He rejected the doctrine of REAL PRESENCE, that the bread and wine become literally the body and blood of Christ

These two powerful reformers met at Marburg in Germany in 1529 to try to resolve their differences and they could not... if anything, the battle lines were even more hardened and the sides could not reconcile in sweet Christian charity. TRAGIC!!!

Later, John Calvin struck a healthy balance between them with what some call the view of SPIRITUAL PRESENCE... that though the bread and wine do not in any sense become the real body and blood of Christ, yet by FAITH IN THE WORD and the significance of the Supper, faith-filled participants can experience a spiritual eating and nourishment that is powerfully rich and beneficial to our walk with Christ

Modern Context:

My purpose here is to begin teaching you HOW TO LOOK AT THE LORD'S SUPPER... or better, "How to look to Christ in the Lord's Supper"

Hebrews 12:1-2 let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith

The LOOK OF FAITH

Faith is the eyesight of the soul... by faith in the word of God, we can SEE spiritual realities and experience an invisible Christ powerfully

By faith, as we come to the Lord's Supper, we can LOOK properly and spiritually

LOOK BACK... LOOK UP... LOOK WITHIN... LOOK DOWN...
LOOK AROUND... LOOK FORWARD

II. Looking Back

A. To the Passover

1. The night of the Lord's Supper was a *seder*, a Passover celebration
2. There are five key parallels between the Passover and the Lord's Supper
 - a. Both the Passover and the Lord's Supper were established as **lasting memorials**, to be commemorated from generation to generation
 - i) The Passover commemorated the Exodus of the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt ... the night of the Passover was the tenth and final plague, the terrifying plague on the firstborn... each Jewish home sacrificed the Passover Lamb and painted the lamb's blood on their doorposts and lintels; the angel of death saw the blood and passed over the Jewish home
 - ii) The Lord's Supper was established to replace the Passover which Christ was about to fulfill... never again would a Passover Lamb need to be sacrificed, for Christ, the Son of God would die as the Lamb of God whose blood would take away the sins of the world
 - iii) Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper was to be passed on from generation to generation

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 Jesus said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So, at the time of the Lord's Supper, we look back to the Passover

We also LOOK BACK...

B. To the Last Supper, the Night Jesus Was Arrested

1 Corinthians 11:23 The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread

1. We remember how Jesus was with His disciples the night He was betrayed
2. We remember how His betrayer dipped his hand into the dish with Jesus, then left to betray him
3. We remember how sad and troubled Jesus' disciples were... and yet how glad Jesus was to eat this one final meal with them
4. We remember the events of that somber night

We also LOOK BACK...

C. To Christ's Death: Body and Blood

1. The bread symbolized Christ's body... broken for us on the cross
2. The blood symbolized Christ's blood... shed for us on the cross
3. This death is the center of our redemption... a clear recognition of one central fact

Romans 6:23 the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christ's identification of the bread with His body and of the wine with His blood focuses our attention on the need for a substitute who would sacrifice Himself in our place to pay the penalty for our sins

We also LOOK BACK...

D. To the New Covenant

1. The Passover was an Old Covenant ordinance... requiring the BLOOD an ANIMAL

Hebrews 9:22 without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

2. Christ here instituted a New Covenant in His own blood, thus ending forever the need for animal sacrifice

1 Corinthians 11:25 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."

By this New Covenant in Christ's blood, the wrath of God is totally satisfied, we are reconciled to our Holy Father, we are made one with Christ... we are FORGIVEN!! We are made forever God's covenant people

We also LOOK BACK...

E. To Our Personal Faith in Christ

1. This is a good time to remember your own personal testimony of faith in Christ
2. How you first believed, how you first came to trust in Christ
3. How the Lord has dealt so graciously with you in the years that followed that initial commitment to Christ
4. WITH GREAT THANKFULNESS you should look over the years of your Christian pilgrimage up to this moment and understand that, had Christ not protected your precious faith every step of the way, you would have fallen away a long time ago

III. Looking Up

A. To God the Father

Whenever Jesus gave thanks for food, He looked up to His heavenly Father... as at the feeding of the 5000:

Matthew 14:19 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.

So also at the Last Supper:

Matthew 26:27-29 Then he took the cup, GAVE THANKS and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

1. It was God the Father who crafted this salvation plan
2. It was God the Father who did not spare His only Begotten Son, but gave Him up for us all
3. The Lord's Supper is part of the Father's sweet efforts to reconcile rebellious sinners to Himself in Christ

B. To Christ, Our Faithful High Priest

1. The Lord's Supper is a constant reminder of our ongoing need for Christ's ministry as our great High Priest
2. NOT as Roman Catholic theology teaches, as though the Lord's Supper were a sacrifice a human priest continually offers to God the Father
3. NO... Jesus was offered ONCE FOR ALL TIME, and need never be offered again
4. But the ongoing, lasting, repeated nature of the Lord's Supper reminds us of our ongoing need for Christ and for His ministry at the right hand of God the Father
5. The eating and drinking reminds us of the constant need for ongoing partaking of Christ... not just one time but continually and spiritually

John 6:53-56 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

C. To the Spirit, Our Power

1. It is the Spirit's ministry to apply Christ directly to each trembling heart and hungry soul
2. It is the Spirit's ministry to take dry old ideas and black and white text on a page and make it ALIVE in human hearts
3. Look now to the Spirit... ask Him to seal you again in Christ, to remind you as you eat of the Lord's Supper that you are Christ's and that He is yours

SO, at the time of the Lord's Supper, WE LOOK UP to God, the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

IV. Looking Within

A. To Our Sinfulness

1. Look at the ugly sinfulness of the first century church in Corinth

1 Corinthians 11:18-22 ...there are DIVISIONS; as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk....

2. So also we must look within to our own sinfulness
 - a. We complain and fail to give God thanks for His many gifts
 - b. We lust and stumble into idolatrous impurity
 - c. We argue and bicker and show great selfishness
 - d. We fail to live for God's glory and Christ's Kingdom
 - e. We fail to witness or care for the needs of the poor
 - f. We do not live up to the calling we have received
3. THEREFORE every Lord's Supper is a time to do serious business with God... to acknowledge the SERIOUSNESS of sin

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For

anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

4. We don't eat flippantly or lightly; we bow in our hearts and search our hearts for sinfulness; we bring out those sins and allow Christ's all-sufficient blood to cover every one
5. We "JUDGE OURSELVES" so that the Lord won't have to judge us

Isaiah 66:2 This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.

We also LOOK INWARD...

B. To Repentance and Faith

1. This is a meal of thankfulness, not of sadness
2. FULL PROVISION is made for any who genuinely repent of sin and trust in Christ

So, we LOOK INWARD...

C. To the Testimony of the Spirit

1. It is the Spirit's work to assure us of Christ's full forgiveness
2. It is the Spirit's work to comfort us as we grieve over our sinfulness
3. It is the Spirit's work to assure us that we are children of God

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Therefore, we LOOK INWARD...

D. To Ensure We Are Eating Worthily

1. If we eat in a manner unworthy of the Lord, we are sinning against the Body and Blood of Christ

2. This is especially true of a gospel hypocrite, who is not genuinely converted, who just knows how to fake Christianity on Sundays and live like the world the rest of the week
3. It is also true of any unbeliever, who partakes of the Lord's Supper for earthly reasons, to impress or please some other person while despising the Lord whose blood paid for the feast
4. These people are actually eating and drinking judgment on themselves by partaking in the Lord's Supper
5. Lest anyone think for a moment that this is some slight memorial, some inconsequential ritual, think on the severity of the penalty the Lord enacted on some Corinthians who DIED because they ate wrongly

V. Looking Down

A. To the Bread and Juice

1. When you take the elements, look down at your hands
2. Look at the piece of physical bread and the actual cup filled with grape juice
3. These are physical elements... they have an aroma, a flavor, an appearance, a weight
4. The physical nature of this ordinance reminds us of the actual BODY and BLOOD of Christ, that, in the fullness of time, were actually given for sins
5. It was no theory, no philosophy, no theology that was nailed to the cross... but the PHYSICAL BODY of Christ

***Colossians 1:21-22* Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation**

B. To the Physical Body of Christ Given ONCE

1. No, the bread IS NOT the actual BODY of Christ

2. Neither is the grape juice the actual BLOOD of Christ
3. That doctrine demeans the ONCE FOR ALL sacrifice of Christ's physical body
4. That offering needs NEVER be repeated again
5. But when our physical hands hold physical bread and cups of physical grape juice, we are reminded of a certain place and time on this planet when God's incarnate Son gave up His physical body for our sins
6. AND they remind us of the time when our hands will be made new in the Kingdom, resurrected bodies in a resurrected universe

VI. Looking Around

A. To the Body of Christ... the One True Church

1 Corinthians 11:33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

1. The Corinthian church struggled with unity
2. They argued, bickered and acted selfishly with each other
3. They hurried ahead and gorged themselves on bread meant for everyone
4. BUT the Lord's Supper was meant to portray our unity with each other
5. The ONE LOAF symbolizes ONE BODY of Christ

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

B. To Our Fellowship Together

1. When we wait for each other, when we look around the room and realize we're not alone at this banquet table

2. When we look around and see the faces of other believers, we feel acutely the UNITY of the Body of Christ... we are one in this fellowship; when one member partakes, we all partake
3. So also we know that there are believers all over the world that partake in this simple feast... all of them united by one Spirit into one body

We also LOOK AROUND...

C. To the Watching Unbelieving World

1. If a pastor does His work properly, all unconverted persons in the sanctuary will be suitably warned NOT TO PARTICIPATE
2. They can observe, they can look on, but until they commit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ in the abandonment of faith, trusting His blood to atone for their sins, all they are doing is eating and drinking judgment on themselves
3. BUT the Lord's Supper itself is a PROCLAMATION of the gospel, silently acted out in front of a watching and not yet Christian audience

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

PROCLAIM then the SAVING POWER of Christ's death... and keep PROCLAIMING it; O how the dying world needs to hear this proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes... indeed, BEFORE He comes, before it's too late

VII. Looking Forward

A. To the Future Coming of Christ

1. Yes, Christ is COMING

1 Corinthians 11:26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

2. We just stated it very plainly... Jesus is coming back someday

3. This homely, symbolic feast, saturated with the powerful ministry of the Spirit, will someday give way to the reality of the returning King
4. And when He comes, He will come in open, powerful glory, with the armies of heaven

B. To the Future Feast in His Kingdom

Matthew 26:29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

1. We will sit with redeemed brothers and sisters from every tribe and language and people and nation

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

Ultimately, we LOOK AHEAD...

C. To Our Future Resurrection

1. The best feast of all... the death of death

Isaiah 25:6-8 On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever.

2. Our resurrection bodies... the joy of the feast will never end, though we will not be sitting at the banquet table endlessly, yet consistent times of feasting in the Kingdom will characterize our eternity with God in the New Heaven and New Earth

Summary:

In the Lord's Supper we are invited to a comprehensive, spiritual look by the Spirit of God

To Look Back: in remembrance to the Passover, to the Night Jesus was betrayed, to Jesus' body broken and blood shed on the cross, to the New Covenant established in His blood, and to our personal faith in that blood

To Look Up: in dependence on God, the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

To Look Inward: in repentance for Our Sinfulness; To Repentance and Faith; To the Testimony of the Spirit; To Ensure We Are Eating Worthily

To Look Down in understanding that the actual bread and juice reminds us that Christ's actual physical body died and His physical blood was shed

To Look Around: in commitment to the Body of Christ, the one true Church united all over the world, and to remaining work of evangelism to a watching world of unbelievers to whom we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes

To Look Ahead: in hopeful trust to the Second Coming of Christ and to the Eternal Kingdom of His Father where we will feast in resurrection bodies forevermore

If you are a Christian, as you do this LOOKING by faith, you should EXPECT to encounter the living God... you should expect a sense of his presence, a greater sense of his love for you in Christ

Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

If you are not yet a Christian, I will ask that you refrain from the Lord's Supper today... but instead look to Christ now by faith! Find forgiveness in him!