

Communion: The Church's Rehearsal Dinner
Brad Myers – Faith Bible Church
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If you would, open your Bibles with me to **1 Corinthians 11**. It's probably a familiar passage to many of you. It's one we read frequently when we're discussing communion, but we'll be studying there briefly this morning.

While you're finding that, I have a thought for you that you may not have considered before. That is, according to *brides.com*, there are eleven easy steps to planning the perfect wedding rehearsal. I don't know how many of you are in that situation, and for those of you that are afraid that maybe I'm reading those kinds of blogs frequently, that's not the case. But it's an appropriate metaphor. Let me read what *brides.com* tells us when it comes to planning the perfect rehearsal dinner for your wedding.

First off, decide who's hosting. It only stands to figure.

Secondly, consider keeping it casual. I was thrilled to run into that one because Jenna and my rehearsal dinner was exceptionally casual.

Thirdly, and this one surprised me, choose a fun theme. I didn't know this was a thing. They can suggest things like a seaside clambake, a first-date celebration, or even a hoe-down.

Fourthly, pick a unique location. Again, I feel like Jenna and I missed this one because we had our rehearsal dinner at my mother-in-law's house, which wasn't unique but was wonderful.

Fifthly, create a guest list. Now, I'm tracking with the list. Now it makes sense who's coming.

Sixthly, time it right so that nobody misses it.

Seventhly, think about the food. Again, this is good.

Eighth, pass the mike. This one was interesting to me because it wasn't so much to hear from multiple people as it was to let anyone speak that you don't want to have try to take the mike from at your wedding reception. So pass the mike so that everyone gets their thoughts out.

Ninthly, give gifts to the wedding party.

Tenthly, make any last-minute friendly reminders without making it sound like a business meeting.

And then eleven, when it comes right down to it, try to have fun.

For those of you who have planned a wedding, you know the night before can be a little challenging to accomplish that eleventh one.

Now, whether or not you find those eleven steps helpful, whether or not you accomplish those eleven steps at your wedding, of which I think I can say Jenna and I only considered about three of them, whether or not any of the rehearsal dinners you have attended have had those, I don't know that I agree with *brides.com*, but I find the imagery of the wedding rehearsal dinner an appropriate metaphor for communion.

As we look at communion this morning, as we consider what the significance is to us, I would like us to think about it like a wedding rehearsal dinner the night before the wedding. See, throughout the New Testament, the church is repeatedly referred to as the "Bride of Christ," most notably in **Ephesians 5** and **2 Corinthians 11**, and consistently through the book of **Revelation**, the church is called the "Bride of Christ." So I want you to imagine with me this morning that we're looking at communion through the lens of the rehearsal dinner for the wedding.

With that in mind, I'm going to read **1 Corinthians 11**. Most of us are probably familiar with **Verses 23-26**, but I'm going to read **Verses 17-34**. So follow along with me:

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

¹⁷ But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What? Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who

have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

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 (broken) 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.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

I’m just going to take a brief moment and linger on **1 Corinthians 11**. I’m not going to try to cover this exhaustively, but I want to make two key notes for us this morning as we examine the Lord’s Supper. The first is:

At the Lord’s table we are celebrating our faith.

At the Lord’s table we are celebrating our faith. In **Verses 23-26** we get this (en)capsuled version of what Christ shared with His disciples at the Last Supper, the last Passover, and it tells us what we’re celebrating and what our faith is in.

See, much like a rehearsal dinner toast. If you have attended one of those rehearsal dinners where maybe the bride and the groom get up, maybe the parents of both couples get up, and they give a brief toast to the couple in

anticipation of the wedding happening the next day. What they're trying to do in those is they're celebrating the relationship. A lot of times they'll go back, and they'll talk about a first date. They'll talk about an awkward moment in their relationship. They'll talk about what they came through or what they did, and they're celebrating that relationship.

That's what precisely what we're doing when we coming to the Lord's Table. We are celebrating God's plan since the foundation of the world to bring a Savior to the earth to save us.

In March, if you were with us in March when Phil led us through a Seder meal of the Passover meal that the Israelites would have taken year after year after year, you understand that what that was, was anticipating Christ's coming. Since the foundation of the world, God designed that Christ would come to save His people, and He gave us hints in that through the Lamb in Passover, through the bread, through that ceremony so that when Christ came, He would be a fulfillment of that.

So much like the rehearsal dinner toast where somebody is celebrating the relationship that the couple has, the Lord's Table allows us to celebrate that God planned this since the foundations of the world, that He always intended to send His Son as the Savior for us.

But secondarily, it allows us not only to celebrate God's plan, it allows us to celebrate Christ's work for us. We talked about this when we talked about the blood and the cup in June. And we talked about the significance of both of those symbol and what they meant to us. We're celebrating Christ's works. When He came and lived a perfect life just like the unblemished lamb on our behalf, when He came and died a death on the cross just like the Passover Lamb.

Then ultimately, we're celebrating Christ's resurrection when He defeated death, He put away the punishment for sin and gave us a pathway to eternal life, gave us an eternal option to know God and be in communion with Him. It's not a coincidence that the words "communion" and "community" sound very similar.

So at the Lord's Table we are celebrating our faith. We are proclaiming the fact that we come to this table because of Christ's work and because of Christ's plan. So communion causes us to remember that we come to the

table only because of what Christ did for us. Much like the rehearsal dinner for a wedding, quite literally, our seat was earned by Christ's work. Before we pull up a seat to the Lord's Table, we have to remember Who purchased that seat for us. So we celebrate our faith. We celebrate what God did for us through the work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But that's not the only thing we do at the Lord's Table. In addition to celebrating our faith at the Lord's Table we also embrace His family. We embrace Christ's family. In those sections, **Verses 17-22**, and then following in **Verses 27-34**, it's speaking to the way the Corinthian church was behaving with one another. See, it's interesting. Many will say that when you go to marry somebody or date someone of the faith, be careful because when you marry that person, you're marrying their family as well, right? I'm incredibly blessed, I love my in-laws, OK? But that's what people say, right? You've got to meet the family. You've got to know what's coming. And the rehearsal kind of gives you a primer for that, doesn't it? Because you invite both your families. At the rehearsal dinner you invite everyone to share a meal together, and you really, really hope that they get along, right? These two families that essentially have nothing in common apart from this couple who now they're family with, right?

See the issues that Paul was addressing in **1 Corinthians** were the church was fighting over divisions about leadership. They were fighting over divisions about how to do their church gatherings, over spiritual gifts. But they were really messing up their celebration of the Lord's Supper. So in this section in he says ...

1 Corinthians 11:17

“... in the following instructions I do not commend you.”

In almost every other encouragement he says, “Yes, but you're doing OK.” There's some encouragement here. He says, “Now you're royally messing it up.”

In fact it's so bad ...

1 Corinthians 11:20

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat.

... and what he's criticizing there is when you come together as a church, you are totally ignorant of the body. You are totally ignoring the new family that is represented at this table. Because some of you eat and get drunk,

and some of you arrive early, you don't care about those that are poor, so he says, "When you come together," "When you come together," it said five times in this section, "When you come together as a church."

When you sit down at His table as the family of God, you have to realize you're embracing Christ's family. To not do that would be to ignore exactly what brought you to the table in the first place. To the Corinthian church was coming to the table with their wealth and their money and their influence assuming that that would be the section that the church would divide itself into.

What Paul says in **1 Corinthians** is, "That's not how the church is divided. The church is divided as one head, and all of the rest of us are just honored to be at the table, not special parts and less special parts."

So to come and not consider the others at the table would be to miss the point of what Christ did. Both the amazing and the frustrating parts about the church is that this is a family where we only have one thing in common. It's frustrating because at times it drives us crazy because I may not have something in common with you as far as talents or hobbies or extra-curricular activities or what I like to do in my spare time. I may not be from the same type of background. I may not be pursuing the same things in life. But we have one thing in common. And it's Christ.

It's frustrating because sometimes that results in friction because we don't get along. But it's also amazing because it's the one place that we ought to see this authentically taking place. We champion that the United States is a place where anybody can come together, and it's this melting pot where we'll all get along. But if you pay any attention to the news, you know that's not happening right now.

The church ought to be the one place where people from diverse backgrounds can come together because of the common union they have in Christ. There's no room for special interest groups or exclusive clubs in the church because each of our seats were bought by Christ, not by ourselves.

I love the way that **Galatians 3** puts this, and obviously Tom recently wrapped up a study on this. It says it this way ...

Galatians 3:25-29

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Now the point here is there is no difference between those people. He's not saying that Jews don't come from a different background than Greeks. He's not saying that there's no difference between men and women. He's not saying that functionally slaves and free do different things. What he's saying is that you all come to the church the same way: empty handed.

So the beauty of the church that's represented at the Lord's Table is the fact that we have young and old together. We have six-year-olds in the front row and eighty-five-year-olds in the back all as brothers in Christ. We have the rich and the poor together. We may not label ourselves that way, but the reality is that what's represented in the church. We have men and women together. We have people from all races and backgrounds and socio-economic situations coming together as one body, the church, pulling up a seat at the same table because of Christ's work on their behalf.

There's an incredible beauty in that. And the beauty of the church is that regardless of our physical families, we all now have one new family. I don't know what your backgrounds are. I don't know if your family gets along well and just saw each other at the holidays or if your family doesn't get along well and didn't see each other at the holidays. I don't know if you found yourself seeing friends and/or family that you haven't seen for a long time or if there was an empty seat at the table because a loved one has passed away. I don't know what your family situation is. I don't know all the backgrounds you come from, but there is something amazing represented in communion of us sitting down at the dining table together as one family.

When it isn't a communion causing us to celebrate our faith, communion also reminds us to embrace Christ's family. See, communion causes us to remember that while we were saved individually, we don't come to the table alone. We come to this table surrounded by a new family, the church. We can't ignore that when we sit down at the table and we pull up a seat, that Christ has purchased with His blood a new family for each and every one of us.

I hope that is an encouragement to you. I know it's an encouragement to me in spite of the fact that as family we have a tendency to rub each other the wrong way at times.

But these two aspects of communion are critical to remember as we take the supper together: That we didn't earn our right to be here, we are simply celebrating the faith we have in Christ; that we don't come here alone, but we literally walk down the aisles together and sit at the table together.

Here in a moment we're going to take communion, and then afterward I'm going to speak a little bit to the fact that communion doesn't only cause us to remember what Christ has earned for us, but it also causes us to look forward, and there's some incredible celebration in communion, as well. So, I just want to encourage you that as we take the elements together, think about the fact that we're celebrating the faith we have in Christ, and think about the fact that we're embracing Christ's family in this action, as well.

Here in a moment Luke is going to come back out and lead us in a song. After that song completes, there will be a second song. When that second song starts, I would encourage you all to get up and come to whatever table is nearest to you. There are people that will be making sure that there are enough elements at each of them, so go to each of the tables and collect the elements, and then take it back to your seats, and we'll all take it together.

The other thing that I want to say that's critical about communion is that if you're a guest with us this morning, one of the things that's important to understand about communion is that communion is a declaration of our faith, and if you haven't made that declaration of faith, if you haven't said that Christ is my Lord and I'm putting my faith and hope in Him alone, I would encourage you not to take the elements with everyone else. We're thrilled that you're here. We're glad you chose to join us. It's simply that we don't want you to declare with your actions something that you haven't owned in your own heart.

So, we encourage you to be here with us. We're thrilled that you are, and we would encourage you to watch those who take communion and consider the reality of what it is that Christ has done for you.

... Communion served ...

Now we get to talk about the wedding celebration. Having observed the Lord's Table, what I want us to do is take a few moments and linger on what the Lord's Table anticipates for us. So turn in your Bibles to **Revelation 19**, and we're going to take a brief look at another passage, and my hope is that that celebration will be what we take away from it because just like the rehearsal dinner in a wedding anticipates the main event of the wedding, the Lord's Table anticipates the ultimate wedding celebration.

Revelation 19:6-10, we get what is referred to as "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb." This beautiful picture of the marriage celebration that will happen after Christ returns. Read with me ...

Revelation 19:6-10

⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

This is the marriage celebration that the Lord's Table causes us to anticipate. We look forward to the ultimate celebration of the real meal, if you will, in **Revelation 19**. So I just want to note a couple of things from **Revelation 19** that we can celebrate and remember as we come away from the Lord's Table.

The first is at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, we will finally see His face.

We will finally see His face. Just like in the wedding ceremony that many of you have seen where you sit there and the groom comes up, and the people are escorted in, and everything waits for that moment when the bride is ready and walks to the back of the service. There's a hush that falls over the crowd. Everyone stands up. The music that everybody plays comes on, and the bride walks down the aisle.

It's that kind of a moment that we see here in **Revelation 19** where the wedding starts and the bride is ready. And we kind of see that idea where, it's even here in **Verses 6-8**, the bride isn't the point. The bride is granted to clothe themselves in righteousness. See, this is where the metaphor breaks down between the way we celebrate marriage ceremonies and the way they were celebrated in Jewish tradition. Because in Jewish tradition what would happen is the husband and wife to be would have become betrothed, and then there's a period of time, about twelve months typically, where they wait in between where the groom goes back and prepares the house for the bride to come. The moment the wedding starts isn't when the bride is ready, it's when the groom arrives to receive his bride. When he comes to her house and she sees his face, the bridal procession starts all the way back to the house where they're going to live in together.

See, much like that in **Revelation 19**, the wedding starts when the groom arrives. It's the wedding supper of the Lamb, not the wedding supper of the bride. We have a tendency to get the focus on us what is eternity going to be like? What do I get to enjoy? And that's all true. But the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is about the Lamb. It's about Christ. So the wedding starts when the groom arrives.

In taking the Lord's Supper together, we look forward to the moment when we see the groom coming down the driveway. We sit in anticipation saying, "I have the bread, and I have the cup, and I remember Christ, but I haven't seen His face, yet."

So the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is what we look forward to in communion, and communion causes to look forward to a time when we won't just remember and proclaim. It causes us to look forward to a moment when we will see Him and experience Him like never before. If we lose sight of the fact that this table is meant to look forward to another

table, we'll lose an element of what's going on because there will come a moment when Christ has clothed His bride the way she's supposed to be clothed and the groom will come to receive the bride.

Every time we take the Lord's Supper, we go, "We're not here, yet." We go, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb isn't here, yet." But one day ...

In Jewish tradition when they did the Passover feast, it was common for them to say, "Next year in Israel ...," or "Next year in Jerusalem ...," I mean. They would go, "Some day, the king is coming. Some day He is going to set this right," and they would say, "Next year in Jerusalem."

The Lord's Supper functions much the same way for us where we say, "Next year with Christ ... , next year with Christ ... , next year with Christ."

So the Marriage Supper of the Lamb reminds us that we will one day see His face, but secondly, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb reminds us that we will one day enjoy Him forever.

In **Verses 9** and **10**, we get John's response to this revelation that the angel has been laying out for him about Christ. We get Him responding to what has happened, and it's much like in the wedding ceremony where the wedding couple has gone out, they've been announced, and they get into that car that the groomsmen have all decorated and put cans behind and that whole ordeal, right? And they drive off into the distance, and what comes flooding into all of our memories as we watch that is every little kid's story we ever watched that ends with, "And they lived happily ever after," right?

Those of us that are married know that it's not a happily-ever-after, necessarily, but there's a reality that though the marriage ceremony doesn't perfectly picture this, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be that.

John rightly responds to the reality of what he's been told that Christ is returning, and He will come and get His bride in worship. He falls down at the feet of the angel in **Verses 9** and **10**, and the angel says, "Don't do that, Worship God!" But he responds with worship to what he's been told.

We should, too, shouldn't we? We do call this "celebrating" the Lord's Table, don't we? But sometimes in our efforts to remember that we should

reflect and we should ask God to examine our hearts as we come to the table, we forget the fact that we should celebrate the fact that we are at the table, and we will one day be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This should be a joyous celebration of worship for what Christ has done and what ultimately we know is going to happen in the future.

So John rightly responds in worship. He also rightly expresses anticipation for this marriage supper. As he ends the book of Revelation in **Chapter 22** and ultimately ends our Bible, he writes these words that I think I would like to leave us with that today. Speaking the words of Christ, he says ...

Revelation 22:12-20

¹² “Behold, I am coming ... , bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

... and then this ...

¹⁷ The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

... and he issues a warning about changing the words, and finishes ...

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

As we take the Lord’s Supper together, as we look forward to the fact that we will celebrate at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb with Christ, our hearts should resound with “AMEN, COME, LORD JESUS!”

As the Marriage Supper of the Lamb tells us that we will rightly enjoy Christ forever, communion causes us to anticipate eternity. It causes us to look forward when we will enjoy Christ's presence and worship Him with all the saints FOREVER!

This morning as we come to the table, we celebrate what Christ has done with THIS body of believers. Some day we will celebrate and worship what Christ has done into eternity with every believer who has ever lived. So if we can't anticipate that day at the Lord's Table, we're missing something.

If we can't look forward to the day when we'll see His face and wait expectantly in worship for the day that we will spend every moment with Him, we're missing something.

I love the way one of the children's Bibles that I read to Josiah at night puts it. It says, "And that day it will be the best days, day after day after day after day."

This Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the ultimate reality that Christ's blood earns us and the communion table causes us to look forward to. So I would encourage you as you continue, my hope is that many of you will take communion many more times, Lord willing, if He doesn't return, we will keep doing this to remember and to celebrate.

So my hope is that when you do, you will be reminded that we are celebrating the faith we have in Christ when we come to this table, the fact that quite literally, our seat was purchased with Christ's blood.

Secondarily, that you will remember that we're embracing Christ's body, that we come to the table together remembering what Christ has done. That He has forged the new family that we get to be a part of, and that ultimately you will celebrate because you will look forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb when we will some day see Christ and we will one day enjoy Him and worship Him into eternity.

If that doesn't stir in our hearts a sense of anticipation and longing for that day, I don't know what will. See, I don't know if *brides.com* has it right about planning a wedding rehearsal. I didn't read it before we planned ours, and I don't have a do-over on planning another one, so I don't know if they got it right. Take or leave the seven tips.

But what I do know is that Christ has given us the perfect supper, the perfect dinner to encourage us today and to help us look forward to tomorrow. My hope is that you'll be encouraged by that and that you will anticipate the wedding celebration some day.

Would you pray with me ...

Father, I'm in awe of the grand design for redemption that You built into history. The fact that before the foundations of the world were laid, You knew that You were going to send Christ, that He was going to live a perfect life on our behalf, die the death that we deserved, and be raised to life again, defeating death once and for all, and that You planned before the foundations of the world that over and over again, Your church would celebrate the Lord's Supper by remembering Christ's body broken for us, remembering His blood shed for us, and anticipating the day when we will finally celebrate and eat in Christ's presence.

Father, we long for that day. We so look forward to the moment when You'll return and take us as Your bride to be with You forever.

Father, that our words over the course of this week and the coming year would be, "AMEN, COME, LORD JESUS!" and that we would wait expectantly for Your return every time we sit at this table.

Father, thank You for Who You are and what You've done for us. Help it to be a reminder and an encouragement to us as we wait for Your return.

In Jesus' name ... Amen.