

Breaking Bread Sermon Notes

These notes are designed to be read in conjunction with a particular series of sermons and are not intended as an exhaustive study of the subject.

Introduction – The Importance of Breaking Bread

The Old Testament is full of rituals and ceremonies - the outward signs of religion were very important. The New Testament shows how all those practices pointed towards a new way of doing things. The outward signs have been done away with. The curtain in the temple, that symbolised the separation of God and Man, was torn in two. Jesus proclaimed a new era where we could have a direct relationship with God. We no longer need priests to mediate between us and God because all of us are priests.

It is significant that, when all the symbolic rituals were done away with, God commanded us to do two new ones – baptism and breaking bread. This shows us how important these two must be.

In the early church they devoted themselves to four things: doctrine, fellowship, prayer and breaking bread (Acts 2:42). This also shows the importance of breaking bread, if it is considered on the same level as prayer and doctrine.

This Study consists of four parts

1. Removing the rubble of tradition – a critical examination of traditions to see if they have any basis in scripture
2. Laying the foundation of “How?” – a detailed look at what the Bible says about how we should break bread
3. Building the wall of “Why?” – a comprehensive study of the reasons why God commands us to break bread
4. Covenants – an overview of the subject focusing on the link between breaking bread and the New Covenant

1. The Rubble of Tradition

a. The name doesn't matter

It is called “The Lord's Supper” once (1 Cor 11:20); “The Lord's Table” once (1 Cor 10:21); mentioned as “communion” twice (1 Cor 10:16); and called “breaking bread” four times (Acts 2:42,46, Acts 20:7,11). If a certain name was important the Bible would say so.

b. The place doesn't matter

The church is the people, not a place. Therefore breaking bread can be done wherever the church is. This includes in people's houses (Acts 2:46)

c. The type of bread doesn't matter

At the last supper Jesus would have used unleavened bread. (This is bread without yeast, that does not rise. It is similar to cream crackers.) He used it because it was part of the Passover meal. The rest of the time the Jews' bread contained yeast and was a bit like naan bread. The Bible doesn't specify what bread has be used so it doesn't matter

d. The contents of the cup doesn't matter

In every place that breaking bread is mentioned the Bible only talks about the cup. We know that at the last supper it contained a drink made from grapes because Jesus refers to it as "fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29). However this is mentioned in passing – not as a command that the cup should contain wine. I personally think that it is good if the cup contains a red coloured drink to symbolise the blood of Christ. However the Bible doesn't tell us what to put in the cup.

e. The way it is served doesn't matter

Some churches have strict traditions on who can serve, or even touch, the bread and the cup. The only instruction that Jesus gave was "take this and divide it amongst yourselves" (Luke 22:17). It may be practical to have servers who pass the emblems out around the congregation, but it is not commanded in scripture.

f. When we break bread doesn't matter

Acts 20:7 implies it became a custom to break bread on a weekly basis. Acts 2:46 implies it could be done daily. Neither of these is a command but they do show it is something that should be done quite often. Originally breaking bread was done in the evening – it was the Lord's *Supper*. Acts 20:7 also implies it was this. However, these are mentioned as examples – not commandments that we have to copy. If the time of day mattered, then the Bible would tell us.

g. The way the emblems are displayed doesn't matter

There is no command in scripture telling us how to display the emblems. At the Last Supper the bread and cup were on a low table simply as part of a meal. The disciples would have been reclining on their left sides whilst leaning on pillows. This is not a command that we should lie down while we break bread. If there was a certain way to display the bread and cup then the Bible would tell us.

h. The bread and cup are just symbols/emblems

Some churches believe that the bread and cup are physically the body and blood of Jesus. There is no reason to think this. The idea was not suggested until 1134AD and only became official Roman Catholic doctrine after a papal decree in 1215AD. When Jesus said "This is my body" he meant it figuratively. If I show you a photograph and say "this is my brother" you don't think I'm related to a piece of paper with coloured inks on it. In John 10 Jesus calls himself a door but we don't believe He is made of wood! When Jesus said "This is my body" the disciples could see the physical body of Jesus in front of them and there would have been no confusion. The bread and cup are important symbols but they are still just symbols. We must beware of concentrating too much on them, rather than on what they represent.

2. The Foundation of "How?"

So what does the Bible command us to do?

- Take bread
- Give thanks
- Eat it
- Take the cup
- Give thanks
- Drink it
- And do it in a worthy manner (1 Cor 11:23-29)

How do we break bread in a worthy manner?

a. In remembrance of Jesus (1 Cor 11:25-26)

As we break bread we should remember Jesus. This means to actively bring Him to mind and think about Him. It would be an unworthy manner if we

- I. Let our minds wander
- II. Don't know why we're breaking bread
- III. Just copy others because we don't want to be left out (this is why we do not let young children break bread)

b. Examine yourself (1 Cor 11:28)

A key part of Christianity is to confess our sins (i.e. admit our mistakes to God and ask His forgiveness). This should be part of breaking bread. We should think back over the week and see if there is anything we need forgiveness for. Is there anything we feel guilty about? Is there an issue with a person that needs to be sorted out? If so we confess our sins. Some people say that you shouldn't break bread if there is a grudge between you and another Christian (based on Matt 5:23-24). This is not true. That scripture is about the hypocrisy of bringing a gift to God when you won't sort out problems. Breaking bread is not about bringing a gift to God. It is about recognising the gift that God has given you. If there are any sin/grudge issues you should confess them, set your intentions to sorting them out, then break bread with a clear conscience. If you won't sort out your issues then you are in rebellion against God and breaking bread unworthily is a small problem in comparison!

c. Discern the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:29)

There are two aspects to this

- I. be aware that the bread represents the body of Christ that was 'broken' for us
- II. remember that the Lord's body is the church

We should remember that there were no chapters in the original letter and that the division between chapters 11 and 12 was put there by man. Chapter 12 clearly explains what Paul meant by the Lord's body, including v27 "now you are the body of Christ". When we break bread we should consider those people around us. "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). This is part of the problem with people who see the God Channel as their church. They are not really living as part of the body. The people in the church belong to one another – we are family. You can't break bread in a worthy manner without recognising this.

3. The Wall of "Why?"

a. Obedience (1 Cor 11:24)

"..do this in remembrance of Me"

Jesus told us to do it, so we do. Part of loving Jesus is to obey His commands (John 14:15)

b. Proclaim His death (1 Cor 11:26)

To "proclaim" means to declare something – make it known to others. When we break bread it is a visible sign to remind us that ...

- I. Jesus suffered physical damage and pain
- II. He actually died
- III. God loves us (John 3:16)
- IV. Jesus gave His life – it wasn't *taken* from Him
- V. the free gift of eternal life had a high price

c. Remember Jesus (Luke 22:19)

"This is My body which is given for you; do this in *remembrance of Me*."

This instruction was given when Jesus was alive. He did not tell us to break bread in remembrance of His death. Although we proclaim His death through breaking bread, we also remember Him. When the disciples broke bread they would have had incredible things to remember. I imagine Peter thinking of the meal they ate on the shoreline after the resurrection (John 21). I imagine Bartimaeus thinking of the day Jesus gave him sight (Mark 10). I imagine the two disciples from the road to Emmaus remembering how they recognised Jesus as He broke bread (Luke 24). It is easy in church to focus on singing, or people, or even enjoying ourselves. Breaking bread is a regular reminder to focus on Jesus Himself and remember what He has done for us.

d. Remember His return (1 Cor 11:26, Matt 26:29)

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

Breaking bread is not something that will be done forever. Whilst we are on earth we still sin and we will always have to come back to confession and forgiveness. When Christ returns that will no longer be true – breaking bread will have lost its relevance and will cease. The two scriptures indicate that even at the Last Supper Jesus was thinking not only of His death, but also of the Second Coming. Breaking bread is therefore a reminder to us that He will return. 1 Thess 4:18 tells us to comfort and encourage one another with that thought.

e. Self examination (1 Cor 11:28)

We have already considered this from the angle of 'how to break bread'. Now we should think about why. Jesus could have instituted breaking bread without including this step. Since He did include it then there must be a reason. I believe regular self examination is vital because..

- I. we need to confess our sins and ask forgiveness. Breaking bread regularly reminds us to do this. Otherwise we can have a tendency to hide our sins rather than confront them.
- II. it helps us put the past behind us. If I am feeling guilty about past sin, then breaking bread helps remind me that Jesus paid the price for my sin once and for all.
- III. it reminds us that we're not perfect. It is possible for Christians to become proud and judgemental as we get older. There is no place for a 'holier than thou' attitude in church.
- IV. if we find ourselves confessing the same sins regularly then it may be a sign that we should seek help.

f. Unity (1 Cor 10:17,11:29)

Again we have already considered this from the angle of 'how'; but now let's think about why Jesus wanted this to be part of breaking bread. One of the worst things that can happen in a church is disunity. The Bible has so many warnings and instructions about how to deal with division and problems between people in church. Many of us have known churches which suffered terribly over differences that led to splits. It is the importance of unity that means we should consider the body every time we break bread. We should ask ourselves questions like...

- I. Am I helping or hindering the body?
- II. Am I accepting of everyone in the church?
- III. Do I have any anger or envy of anyone?
- IV. Am I aware that I have hurt anyone?
- V. Is there a type of person that I feel prejudiced against?

If any church is to go forward successfully then they must be in unity (Psalm 133)

g. Communion with Christ (1 Cor 10:16)

Communion means to share in, to participate in, to be a part of, to have fellowship etc. Our word 'community' comes from it. When we break bread we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ. But what does that actually mean? It is better understood in the wider context of the Bible.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53). This does not mean that the bread and cup are the physical body and blood of Christ. In fact this scripture is not directly talking about breaking bread at all. He is speaking figuratively (see also John 4:14,7:37, 1 Cor 12:13).

In context He was saying "Your ancestors ate manna. Something supernatural that came down from heaven. They ate it and it sustained their lives but in the end they died anyway. I am the real bread of life. I am supernatural. I came from heaven. If you partake of me I will sustain your lives in a way that means you never die."

So we must partake of Jesus. We must come to Him and accept what He has to offer. When we eat something we take it in and it becomes part of us. This is what Jesus is asking us to do. To hunger for Him; to come to Him and say "Jesus be a part of me and my life". This is an act of communion. When we pray it is an act of communion. When we read the Bible or worship they are acts of communion. John 6:53-60 is not talking about breaking bread specifically – it is talking about *all acts of communion*; things we do daily in lots of ways. However breaking bread is also an example of an act of communion. What better time to ask Jesus to feed our hunger and sustain us, than when we eat the bread? What better time to drink of the Spirit of God than when we take the cup?

Isaiah 55:1-2 encourages us to come to God and freely get the spiritual food and drink that we need to live. We should do it everyday, but breaking bread reminds us to do it when we might otherwise forget.

This also helps us to understand 1 Cor 11:29-30 "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep."

To explain these verses fully is beyond the scope of these notes (but come and ask me if you're interested). Put simply, there are two ways we could understand them

- I. "God is making many people sick and even killing them because they don't break bread in a worthy manner." *This cannot be the correct interpretation.* It is clear that God's judgement of people now happens after they're dead (Heb 9:27)
- II. People are effectively judging themselves because they're not drawing strength from God. We need physical food and drink to live a healthy life. Without them we feel ill and eventually die. If we neglect to pray, to confess our sins, to remember Jesus, to live in unity etc, then we are cutting ourselves off from God's blessing. If you don't commune with God, then no wonder you feel sick! It is not a punishment from God but a consequence of the way you live your life. In effect you are bringing a judgement/punishment on yourself. Remember that breaking bread is not the only act of communion that connects us with God, but it is an important one.

4. Covenants

The eighth reason we break bread is to do with covenants. Since this is a poorly understood topic, it is worth looking at it more detail before we consider how breaking bread is linked to it.

a. What is a covenant?

In general terms a covenant is an agreement, contract or deal. I have a contract/covenant with my employer. I go work and perform my duties for a certain number of hours. In return my employer pays me a salary. We have an agreement.

The Bible's use of the word covenant is very similar though generally on a bigger scale. The covenant has no time limits and involves every aspect of the people/cities/countries involved. It would be an agreement to be fully committed to each other, in every way rather than just a business arrangement. Perhaps surprisingly, the Bible mentions more covenants between people than between man and God.

b. The first example of a 'covenant' (Gen 9:9-17)

This, like all covenants, had certain features.

- I. It was God's idea – He initiated it (v9)
- II. It tells us who the covenant is with – Noah, his descendants and every living creature (v9-10)
- III. It tells us what is promised – that the earth will never again be destroyed by a flood (v11)
- IV. There was a sign – the rainbow (v12-16). Whenever anyone (God or man) sees the sign they remember the covenant

Usually there are some conditions/ requirements.

c. The second example (The 'Old Covenant' Gen 17:1-21)

- I. It was God's idea (v2)
- II. It tells us who the covenant is with – Abraham and his descendants (v7)
- III. It tells us what is promised – to multiply Abraham and his descendants(v2), to make nations and kings come from him (v6) and to give him the land of Canaan (v8)
- IV. It had requirements – "Walk before me and be blameless" (v1)
- V. There was a sign – circumcision (v10-14)

d. The expansion of the old covenant

- I. It was God's idea (Ex 19:5)
- II. It tells us who the covenant is with – the house of Jacob (Ex 19:3)
- III. It tells us what is promised (Ex 19:5-6, Deut 28:1-13)
- IV. It had requirements (Exodus chapter 20 onwards)
- V. There were two signs – the blood of the covenant (Ex 24:8) and salt (Lev 2:13)

e. The New Covenant

- I. God had always intended to make another covenant with mankind. Virtually everything in the Old Covenant was pointing the way towards this new and better covenant. (Jer 31:31-34, Heb 8:7-13)
- II. The covenant is with whoever believes and calls on Jesus (Romans 10:4,11-13)

- III. Dake's Reference Bible lists 250 New Covenant promises. These include
- Saved from sin (Rom 6:14)
 - Eternal life (John 3:16)
 - Can be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)
 - All necessary things will be yours if you put God first (Matt 6:33)
 - God will answer your prayers (John 14:14)
 - God will build His church with a place for you (Matt 16:18, Rom 12:4-8)
 - Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11)
 - Makes you more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37)
 - Gives you power (Acts 1:8)
 - Healing (Mark 16:18)
 - Peace (Philp 4:6-7)
 - Joy (John 15:11)
 - Life to the full (John 10:10)
 - Gives you victory (1 Cor 15:57)
 - Grace (Eph 2:4-8)
 - Purpose in life (Eph 2:10)
 - Spiritual armour (Eph 6:13-17)
 - All things in your life will work together for good (Rom 8:28)
 - Exceeding great and precious promises that make you partake in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4)
 - Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places (Eph 1:3)

IV. What is required? Nothing and everything

Nothing because it's free

Everything because we're asked to hold nothing back in our devotion to God

- V. What is the sign? (1 Cor 11:25) "This cup is the new covenant in My blood " Every time we take the cup it is a reminder of the covenant we have with God. Every time we break bread God remembers the promises He has made to us, just like the rainbow reminds Him of the first covenant (Gen 9:16)

Every time you are offered the cup God is saying to you

- I will never break this covenant (Deut 7:9), will you?
- "Are you still a part of this contract?"
- Do you still want these promises to apply to you?
- Are you still willing to keep your half of the agreement?"

If the answer is "Yes" then you drink from the cup – it is like signing again on the dotted line of a contract. You wouldn't sign a contract lightly and God expects you to take it seriously when you break bread. The eighth reason that we break bread is to regularly remember and renew our covenant with God.

f. An illustration of the new covenant

NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and 26 countries are currently members. All of them have signed the North Atlantic Treaty which is a surprisingly simple document. It is, in effect, a covenant. A key sentence in the treaty is

"The Parties of NATO agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."

In other words you cannot attack the United Kingdom by itself. An attack on the UK is an attack on NATO and the other 25 countries will retaliate and defend us. A Christian is in covenant with God. You cannot be attacked by yourself. You don't have to go through anything by yourself because God is on your side. "If God is for us, Who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31)

Comparison of Old & New Covenants

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Law of sin (Rom 7:23, 8:2)	Law of righteousness (Rom 9:31)
Law of flesh (Rom 7:5-6)	Law of the Spirit (Rom 8:2)
Not of faith (Gal 3:12)	Of faith (Rom 3:27)
Brings bondage (Gal 5:1, 4:24-25)	Brings liberty (Jam 1:25, 2 Cor 3:17)
Brings death (2 Cor 3:6-7)	Brings life (2 Cor 3:7, Rom 8:2)
Condemns (2 Cor 3:9)	Makes free (Gal 5:1, John 8)
A shadow of reality (Heb 10:1)	Reality (Heb 10:1-18)
Obsolete (Heb 8:13)	In force now (Heb 8:6)
Can't make perfect (Heb 7:19)	Can make perfect (Heb 12:23)
Glorious (2 Cor 3:7)	More glorious (2 Cor 3:8-10)
Can't remove sin (Heb 10:4)	Saves to the uttermost (Heb 7:25)
Many sacrifices (Heb 9:12-13)	One sacrifice (Heb 10:12)

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