

Celebrating The Lord's Supper

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[0 : 00] For those of you who do not know Beth Moore, she is an outstanding Bible teacher and the writer of Bible studies, and she is a married mother of two daughters, and this is one of her experiences.

And she writes, on April the 20th of 2005, at the airport in Knoxville, while waiting to board the plane, I had the Bible on my lap, and I was very intent upon what I was doing. I had a marvelous morning with the Lord, and I say this because I want to tell you, it is a scary thing to have the Spirit of God really working in you.

You could end up doing some things that you never would have done otherwise. Life in the Spirit can be dangerous for a thousand reasons, not the least of which is our ego.

I tried to keep from staring, but he was such a strange sight. He was humped over in a wheelchair, and he was skin and bones, dressed in clothes that obviously fit when he was at least 20 pounds heavier.

[1 : 05] His knees protruded from his trousers, and his shoulders looked like the coat hanger was still in his shirt. His hands looked like tangled masses of veins and bones.

The strangest part of him was his hair and his nails. Stringy, gray hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back. His fingernails were long, clean, but strangely out of place on this old man.

I looked down at my Bible as fast as I could, discomfort burning my face. As I tried to imagine what his story might have been, I found myself wondering if I had just had a Howard Hughes experience. Then I remembered that he was dead. So this man at the airport, an imposter perhaps, was a camera on us somewhere? There I sat, trying to concentrate on the word to keep from being concerned about a thin slice of humanity served up on a wheelchair only a few seats from me. All the while, my heart was growing more and more overwhelmed with the feeling for him. Let's admit it, curiosity is a heap more comfortable than true concern.

[2 : 17] And suddenly, I was awash with aching emotion for this bizarre-looking old man. I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen, and it may be embarrassing.

I immediately began to resist because I could feel God working on my spirit, and I started arguing with God in my mind. Oh, no, God, please, no.

I looked up at the ceiling as if I could stare straight through it into heaven, and I said, Don't make me witness to him. Not right here and not now. Please, I'll do anything. Put me on the same plane, but don't make me get up here and witness to this man in front of this gawking audience.

Please, Lord. And there I sat in the blue vinyl chair begging his highness, Please don't make me witness to this man. Not now. I'll do it on the plane. And then I heard it.

I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair. The words were so clear that my heart leaped into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top.

[3 : 30] Do I witness to this man, or do I brush his hair? No brainer. I looked straight up at the ceiling, and I said, God, as I live and breathe, I want you to know that I am ready to witness to this man.

I'm on this, Lord. I'm on this, Lord. I'm your girl. You've never seen a woman witness to a man faster in your life. What difference does it make if his hair is a mess if he's not redeemed?

I'm going to witness to this man. And again, as clearly as I've heard an audible voice, God seemed to write this statement across the wall of my mind.

That is not what I said, Beth. I don't want you to witness to him. I want you to go and brush his hair. I looked up at God, and I quipped, I don't have a hairbrush.

It's in my suitcase on the plane, and how am I supposed to brush his hair without a hairbrush? God was so intent that I almost involuntarily began to walk toward him as these thoughts came to me from God's will.

[4 : 32] I will thoroughly furnish you unto all good works, 2 Timothy 3.17. I stumbled over to the wheelchair, thinking that I could use one myself.

Even as I retell this story, my pulse quickens, and I feel those same butterflies. I knelt down in front of the man, and I asked him demurely, as demurely as possible, Sir, may I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?

He looked back at me, and he said, What did you say? May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair? To which he responded in volume 10, Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you're going to have to talk louder than that.

At this point, I took a deep breath, and I blurted out, Sir, may I have the pleasure of brushing your hair? At which point, every eye in the place darted right at me.

I was the only thing in the room looking more peculiar than old Mr. Longlock's. Face crimson and forehead breaking out in sweat, I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face.

[5 : 42] And he said, If you really want to. Are you kidding? Of course I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then.

He pressed on my heart until I could utter these words. Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush. I have one in my bag, he replied.

So I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees, and I unzipped the stranger's old carry-on, hardly believing what I was doing. I stood up, and I started brushing the old man's hair.

It was perfectly clean, but it was a tangled and matted mess. I don't do many things well, but I must admit that I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair, mothering two little girls.

Like I'd done with either Amanda or Melissa in such conditions, I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time and not to pull.

[6 : 45] A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair. Everybody else in that room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me.

I brushed and I brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out of his hair. I know this sounds strange, but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life.

I believe with all my heart that I, for those few moments, felt a portion of the very love of God, that he had overtaken my heart for a little while, like someone renting a room and making himself at home for a short while.

The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew that they had to be God's. When his hair was finally as soft and as smooth as an infant's, I slipped the brush back into the bag and went around to the chair and faced him.

I got down on my knees and I put my hands on his knees and said, Sir, do you know my Jesus? And he said, Yes, I do. Well, that figures, I thought.

[7 : 57] And then he explained, I've known him since I married my bride. She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior. He said, You see, the problem is I haven't seen my bride in months.

I've had open heart surgery and she's been too ill to come to see me. I was just sitting here thinking to myself, What a mess I must be for my bride. Well, only God knows how often he allows us to be a part of a divine moment where we're completely unaware of the significance.

This, on the other hand, was one of those rare encounters when I knew God had intervened in details that only he could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it.

Our time came to board, and we were not on the same plane. I was deeply ashamed of how I had acted earlier and would have been so proud to have accompanied him on that aircraft.

I still had a few minutes, and as I gathered my things to board, the airline hostess returned from the corridor, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. And she said, That old man is sitting on the plane.

[9 : 07] He's just sobbing. Why did you do that? What made you do that? And I said, Do you know Jesus? He can be the bossiest thing. And we got to share.

And I learned something about God that day. He knows that if you're exhausted, if you're hungry, if you're serving in the wrong place, or if it's time to move on, but you feel too responsible to budge. He knows if you're hurting. He knows if you feel rejected. He knows if you're sick or drowning under a wave of temptation. Or he knows if you just need your hair brushed.

He sees you as an individual. Tell him your need. I got on my own flight, and sobs were choking my throat, wondering how many opportunities, just like this one, had I missed along the way, all because I didn't want people to think that I was strange.

God didn't send me to that old man. He sent that old man to me. John 1.14 says, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[10:21] Life shouldn't be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly shouting, Wow, what a ride.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you. Well done, Carolyn.

Thank you. Thank you so much. To open the scriptures, please, to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17. I will be brief in my comments this morning, so we'll have ample time for an unhurried serving of communion.

That is certainly something that ought not to be rushed. And preparatory to reading the passage in Acts 17, I want to share with you an article that I referred to Wednesday evening at our midweek gathering that was in the Springfield newspaper of Tuesday, June 24, entitled Religious Americans, My Faith Isn't the Only Way.

And I'm not going to read the entire article, but I just want to inform you that it was written after an extensive poll had been taken among 35,000 adults.

[12:10] And these people were asked whether they thought their particular faith, whatever it might have been, was the only acceptable faith or the only acceptable way to approach God.

And, of course, the vast majority of them, including many who said they were Christians, said that, no, their way was not the only way, that there are numerous legitimate ways to God, and God is accepting of all of them.

And that is the common, conventional wisdom today. Matter of fact, it probably always has been.

But today, it seems to enjoy a pronounced emphasis that it didn't in years past.

I suspect that almost as long as man has been around, there has been the conviction on the part of the average individual that God is approachable in a number of different ways.

After all, He is a creative God, and He is a God of diversity, and He is a God of great capability. So it is well within the realm of reason that God could orchestrate and create several different ways of coming to Him, any one of which would be just as good as the other.

[13:34] That sounds very reasonable. Sounds very charitable. It sounds very live and let live. But we have to ask ourselves whether that's really the case, or whether that is just an appeal in the outworkings of human logic.

Human logic isn't always wrong, but usually it is. Usually, the way we think and the way we do things is contrary to the way that God does things.

And a verse was quoted in the Sunday school class just this morning that reminded me of this.

There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.

So there are a lot of things that seem logical, seem reasonable, seem okay, but they can be very, very deadly.

And when it comes to the subject of approaching God, I do not know of any subject that is more important than that. If you will look at Acts chapter 17, I want to begin reading with verse 22 because this subject is spelled out right here and in numerous other places as well.

[15:09] In our series of Bible study brunches, we are talking about the non-negotiables of Christianity.

And this is one of the non-negotiables. We refer to the exclusivity of the person and work of Jesus Christ. And in case you do not know it, you certainly ought to be informed about it.

And that is this. This, probably more than any other, is the major sticking point for Christianity.

More people have more difficulty with this one point than they do any other. I do not think there is anything that makes more people shun away from biblical Christianity than this.

It is the Christians' insistence that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. He's not merely the right way.

[16:19] He is the only way. People really shudder at that. I have even seen well-known evangelists and spiritual leaders on programs such as Larry King Live.

And Larry, coming from a Jewish background and tradition, almost always hits them with this question. What do you feel about Christianity? Do you feel that your way is the only way? Do you feel that Jesus Christ is the only way to God?

And you wait for the answer and sometimes it's the right answer, but more often than not, it is this. Well, I wouldn't presume to say that anybody is lost or saved. I leave that to God. That's God's prerogative. It is not mine to judge who goes to heaven or hell.

And they bail out with that. And it is a bailout. I can understand their unwillingness to be put in a position where they would look like a terribly narrow, bigoted individual.

[17:27] And invariably, they translate that into this for anyone who says Christ is you. Oh, you believe your way is the only right way and everybody doesn't believe what you believe is going to hell. Well, who wants to be put in a box like that?

Nobody I know of. So, here's the point. And I want to make this as crystal clear as I can.

Jesus Christ is the only way, but not because we say he is, but because his Father says he is.

We are not the authority. It is true. We do not make the decision. We do not have the prerogative of who goes to heaven and who goes to hell.

That isn't for us to decide. But God has already established the criteria. And I know this cuts completely across conventional wisdom because they see many ways.

[18:36] Most people, including myself, before I came to faith in Christ, most people are of the opinion that whatever faith you believe, whatever faith you were reared in, that's fine.

Why should anyone be condemned to hell just because they were born in India or Africa and have never heard of your Jesus Christ whom you believe is the only possible way of salvation?

You're going to just send all of those people to hell because they've never heard? And what is our response to that? I want to establish another thing right up front.

And this, to me, is really a major element to the whole argument. And that is this. Every single living human being will receive from God at an absolute minimum perfect justice.

Everyone will receive perfect justice. Someone who was born in a far away country, far away from biblical Christianity and Christian radio programs and all of the rest of it, never heard the name of Christ, they are in line to receive from God perfect justice.

[20:09] That means they will get exactly, exactly what they deserve. Now, let me ask you a question. Is there something wrong with that?

people getting exactly what they deserve?

Or, let me translate that into modern commercialism. Is there something wrong with you getting exactly what you pay for?

for? Is there something wrong with that? Do we call that getting your money's worth? Don't we tend to think of that as being right?

That you get what you pay for? Is there something wrong with people receiving justice from God?

[21:15] Has God somehow shortchanged them because they receive His justice? Have people in some way been treated unfairly because they receive justice from God?

I do not see how. justice means you get your just desserts. You do not receive any retribution that you do not have coming and have not earned.

Is there something wrong with that? I don't think so. And when I say that God is absolutely committed to doing this justice for every individual at the very least and the reason He has to give people justice at the very least is because He is a righteous God.

He is a holy God. He is a just God. He has to dispense at a minimum justice and I make that point at a minimum.

God cannot do less justice. But we are here this morning because God can do more. Justice is at a minimum.

[22:47] Grace goes beyond that. God can do more and that is grace. Justice means you get what you do not deserve.

justice means you get what you do deserve and grace means you get what you do not deserve. Do you realize that God provided a message called the gospel, the good news, and it is really designed

to do just one thing.

it is designed to rescue and deliver people from God's justice.

Think about that. When we preach the gospel, we are giving people an opportunity to get out from under the justice of God so that they will not receive what they deserve, what they have coming, but that they will receive more, and that is grace.

The scriptures make it very clear, and we'll read here in Acts 17, if you'll begin with me, with verse 22, where this justice and this grace that is more than what God can do, is provided through this one vehicle only.

[24 : 23] Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription to an unknown God.

What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. In other words, Paul is telling them, you think that there is a God that you don't know about, so you erect this statue and you put down here on the base, instead of the name of the deity, you put to the unknown God, kind of like we do with the tomb of the unknown soldier.

We know there is an American soldier buried in that tomb, but he is not identified. So, we honor the unidentified dead by saying, this is erected in memorial as a tomb to the unknown soldiers, and this one represents it.

And the apostle says to these intelligent men, probably this group of men gathered here on Mars Hill were probably the most intellectually oriented, mentally gifted men, perhaps on the planet at the time.

These were the learned men, deep thinkers. And Paul rebukes them for their paganism, and he says, well, might you say that you have erected an altar to an unknown God?

[25 : 58] And let me tell you something. I have come here today to tell you about this God that you do not know. How fitting. He is, verse 24, he is the God who made the world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Now, his being Lord needs to be defined, so let me briefly explain that. What the word Lord means is the one above whom and beyond whom there is none other.

Lord is Lord. This is the ultimate being. There is no one, no authority, and no person above or beyond this one who wears the name Lord.

It's unequaled and unparalleled. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in temples made with hands, neither is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all life and breath and all things, and he made from one every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, for we also are his offspring.

[27 : 46] Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine nature is like gold or silver or stone. an image formed by the art and thought of man.

Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now, as of the time I am speaking to you, Paul is saying, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent.

This is an obligation under which all of humanity is fixed. that all men everywhere should repent.

That means change their mind. Change their mind. Why? Because they have been given information that will bring them to where they need to be. And they need to change their mind about what they have believed and embrace this new information.

And the scriptures call that the gospel, the good news. And the reason that all men everywhere should repent is because he, this Lord, this God, has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.

[29 : 04] And interestingly enough, the word for justice, just and righteous, all the same Greek word, dikaios. Righteousness and justice are synonymous.

And that is the basis on which God is going to judge all men on the basis of righteousness and justice. Through a man.

a man. The man. Christ Jesus.

No other man. Not Buddha. Not Muhammad. Not Joseph Smith. No other man.

Through a man whom he has appointed. God. Having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

[30 : 20] God himself determines the object of man's faith that he will recognize. It is not up to man. God has clearly stipulated in his word.

And how many times have I told you? God. It's all about authority. It always comes back to this. What do we accept as our authority?

If we accept the Bible as our authority, there is absolutely no question, no equivocation, no contradiction that Jesus Christ is the singular individual whom God provided to pay the penalty for our sin.

We have to say Jesus Christ is the only way because God says he is the only way. It is not our decision.

This is not arrived at by taking a poll among Christians and if you get more Christians to say that's the way it is than who do not, then that's the way it is. nonsense. This was not our decision.

[31 : 31] We didn't arrive at this. If you want to call someone narrow, you'll have to call God narrow. And do you know, he is.

He is narrow about a lot of things. But he has a right to be because he is not only narrow, he is right. God has provided one way.

And to me, it is absolutely striking. And you talk about arrogance. This is the thing that Christians are charged with. You realize that, don't you? You are arrogant. How can you say that Christianity and Christ is the only way?

How arrogant? I'll tell you what is arrogant. What is arrogant is to hear the gospel truth that he who knew no sin was made sin for us, wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, died as a substitute in our place.

And to look at that death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and then to say, well, is that the only thing God has done to provide for our redemption?

[32 : 53] That's what's arrogant. What is arrogant is to say, well, it's okay that he did one way, but he should have made several ways. That's what's arrogant.

Does God have the right to do what he will with that which he has created and made solely, totally, entirely?

Does he have a right? Does he have a right to provide no way at all? Yes, he does.

There is one thing that he does not have a right to do, and that is this. He does not have a right to act contrary to his nature. He cannot do that.

He cannot give anyone less than justice. But he allows himself to give more.

[34 : 00] And when the gospel is preached, it is simply the good news that delivers people from the justice so richly deserved, removed from the justice of God and brought into his grace.

It's wonderful. Is it not true that this aggregate of Christians all over the world, and you know as well as I do, there are a lot of people under the umbrella of Christianity who are not Christians at all.

They were just born into it, and they're like I was. When the pastor asked me on the day that I was married whether I was a Christian, and I immediately flashed through my mind, I'm not an atheist, I'm not a Jew, I'm not a Buddhist, I'm not a Muslim.

Yeah, put me down. That's exactly the kind of Christian a lot of people are, you know? So even if you remove all who just place themselves under the general blanket of Christianity because of tradition or whatever, and limit it to those who are really redeemed by the finished work of Jesus Christ, and they know their sins are forgiven because Christ died in their place.

Call them born-again Christians, regenerated, biblical Christians, whatever. What kind of a minority do you think that they constitute out of the billions of people in the world?

[35 : 44] Probably, probably a percentage or a fraction that is pretty tiny. Now, let me ask you another question. With conventional wisdom, does that seem right to you?

That such a few number of people in connection with the whole world's population of, what are we now, six billion, that's with a B, that they should be saved?

And then let me ask you another question. Can so many billions of people be wrong?

Let me ask you another question. Let's go all the way back to Genesis chapter 6, where we've got eight people floating on an ark.

Noah preached this message of coming disaster and no doubt was ridiculed and rejected, probably called all kinds of names.

[37 : 00] I imagine he made his boys embarrassed at his behavior and at his positions. Can you imagine these people saying to him, oh, so you believe that just you and your family are the only ones who are going to be saved and everybody else is going to die?

All these people are wrong. These are all wicked, sinful people and they're all going to die and you eight, you're the only ones who are going to be saved. Can you imagine Noah fielding a question like that on Larry King Live?

You believe that your family, you and your family and everybody else is going to perish in this great flood. What was it you called it? What was it? Rain.

Yeah, rain. We don't know what that is. We've never had that before. And you're telling us that we should believe that and we should join your clan of eight who are very arrogant, very bigoted, and very narrow.

But if we don't, there's no salvation for us. What kind of a percentage do you think those eight people occupied versus all of the other world population, whatever it was, can so many people be wrong?

[38 : 17] Well, they were. Because, hear me, right and wrong are not determined by how many people support it.

right and wrong are determined by whether it's right or whether it's wrong.

And only this one above whom and beyond whom there is none other has the authority, the wisdom, and the right to determine what is right and wrong.

and he has told us what is right and wrong in this book. And when it comes to personal salvation, he has appointed, he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.

He is that one through whom and in whom God has vested everything, including our salvation.

[39 : 37] So what about all of the millions, what about all of the billions of people who have never heard and never will hear? What is their lot? Their lot is this.

They will receive absolute, absolute, perfect justice from God. Exactly what they deserve. But those who are partakers of his grace are they who have responded to the message that we all here are incredibly blessed to have received.

Because we were born in a country. Let's face it. We were born in a country where this message is far more available than it is in other places. But I don't want you to think in terms of the people who were lost and the billions who were lost.

It is tragic and it is shameful because these poor people are going to suffer a fate that they do not deserve. No, they aren't. They are going to suffer a fate, but they deserve it.

And so did you. Only thing that brings us out from under it is the proclamation and the reception of this gospel.

[40 : 58] And when we gather together to celebrate the Lord's table, we do show forth the Lord's death until he comes. Cup reminds us of his blood.

Bread reminds us of his body. And they are just visible, physical reminders of who Jesus Christ is and what he did. So you can see the legitimacy for the need of missions.

And by the way, if every faith and every religion is equally valid, then there is no basis for winning converts or evangelizing or proselytizing because there is only one legitimate reason for anybody changing faiths.

And that is they come to a belief that the faith they now have is wrong. So what do you do? Change your mind.

You repent. You turn your back on what you now understand to be wrong and you embrace what you now understand to be right. and the one you embrace is Jesus Christ who died in your place.

[42 : 13] That's the gospel of the grace of God. God does not owe this grace to anyone. That is why those who receive this grace are somehow in a more advantageous position than those who have not.

Oh no. No, no. It doesn't work that way. Those who do not receive grace or reject grace get exactly what they deserve.

We get what we do not deserve and the reason we do is because Christ died in our place to make the difference. Everybody gets what they deserve at a minimum.

Those in Christ get more. So when we preach the gospel we give people information that provides them with a basis of changing their mind and that's really all it is.

It is a message that requires obedience and reception and when we do that we become recipients of God's grace through that gospel.

[43 : 25] It is an incredible concept. It is a way that God has made so that everyone doesn't have to get his justice and Jesus took justice for us did he not?

You're going to be hearing a whole lot more about this subject in time to come because it is a hot potato item and it is called religious pluralism. It is the idea of course that all faiths are equally valid and that no faith is superior or stands out or is the right faith and that everyone else is the wrong faith.

Folks at the expense of at the expense of what some would say sounds arrogant and narrow we just must absolutely dig our heels in on this one.

We cannot give any quarter at all because if you barter away if you negotiate away the exclusivity of Christ particularly and it's almost always in an effort to be more amenable more agreeable not so narrow more giving if you negotiate away the exclusivity of Christ whatever it is that you have left is not Christianity it is something else but don't call it Christianity Christianity is Christ would you open your hymnal please to number 403 history to hot there is how are you what are you what are you what are thoughts the