

Love Your Church by Gathering

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Matthew, Matthew chapter 26, and if we read again at verse 26.

Matthew 26 and verse 26. Now, as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat, this is my body.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

If you remember last Lord's Day, we began a study called Love Your Church. Love Your Church.

It's a study based upon the helpful yet hard-hitting book by Tony Merida, Love Your Church.

And it's a book in which we're exhorted and encouraged to love your church because Jesus loves your church. Love your church because Jesus loves your church. And as we saw last week, our church is our focus.

[1 : 25] Our church is our focus because our focus in our study is not universal and worldwide. Our focus is just our church, our congregation in this community.

Our focus is not any other congregation in this community or in any other congregation in any other community. Our focus is Barvis Free Church. Because as we said, this is our family.

This is our church family. All of these people around us this evening, they are our family. And as Jesus, our elder brother, emphasized and taught us, we're to love our church family.

Love one another, said Jesus, as I have loved you. For by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. So our focus, our family, and then we're to love our church because this is our fellowship.

This is where we get to know one another. This is where we grow with one another. This is our fellowship. And so just to recap on last week, our church is our focus, our church is our family, and our church is our fellowship.

[2 : 35] But this evening, we're considering the theme of gathering, the theme of gathering, gathering together as our church family. And I want us to think about this under three simple headings, our family meeting, our family membership, and our family meal.

Our family meeting, our family membership, and our family meal. So first of all, our family meeting. Our family meeting. Look at verse 17 of chapter 26.

Now verse 17, it says there, Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where would you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover? He said, Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, The teacher says, My time is at hand.

I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them. And they prepared the Passover. Now at this point in Matthew's gospel, Jesus, he's only hours away from his betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

But this scene, it comes in the last week of Jesus's life. Because as you know, Jesus, he entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey on Palm Sunday.

[3 : 58] And from one Sunday to the next Sunday, everything was going to change. Because on Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem. On Monday, if you read it in the earlier chapters of Matthew, Jesus preached and proclaimed many parables against the religious leaders and about the second coming.

Then on Tuesday, we read it there in chapter 26. On Tuesday, Jesus was anointed by a woman with an alabaster box of precious ointment in preparation for his burial.

Then on Wednesday, we read it, Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests to make this deal, a deal to deliver Jesus over to them for only 30 pieces of silver.

Then on Thursday, which is verse 17, it was preparation day for the Passover. Friday was the Passover, but it was also, as we know it, to be Good Friday.

It was the day Jesus was sacrificed and substituted as our Passover lamb. Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, the day of rest. And Sunday, Easter Sunday, was the day of resurrection.

[5 : 06] It was the Lord's day. And so from one Sunday to the next, everything changed. I suppose just like our past week. From one Sunday to the next, everything in our nation has changed.

What we see in verse 17 is that Matthew tells us that it's the first day of unleavened bread. It's a Thursday. It's the first day of unleavened bread, the day of preparation before the Passover. It's the day on which the Jews would remove all the yeast or the leaven from their homes in commemoration and in celebration of the first Passover. And we looked at it when we were studying Exodus, the occasion when the Israelites, they sheltered under the blood, the sprinkled blood that was upon the lintel and the doorposts of their houses.

They were sheltering under the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb. And so this is why the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?

Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover? Now, I just want to linger there for a little moment because the disciples, they were basically asking Jesus, where do you want us to meet together?

[6 : 24] Where is our family meeting to take place? Where are we going to eat our family meal? Because the Passover was, it was instituted and instructed to be a family meeting and also a family meal.

And of course, Jesus and his disciples, they were a family. They were a church family. They were the first church family. They were, although a small church family with small beginnings, nevertheless, they were a church family.

And we know that they were a church family because Jesus called all of these disciples to himself. He called them out. He called these disciples to himself.

I'm sure you remember when Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee and he saw two brothers and they were there mending their nets, Peter and Andrew. And Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

And going a little further, we're told that Jesus saw another two brothers. He saw James and John, the sons of Zebedee. And he called to them. He said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

[7 : 34] When Jesus passed by Matthew, boys and girls, Matthew, he was sitting at his tax collector's booth and Jesus called him. He said, follow me.

And that's because that's the great call of the gospel where Jesus says to us, follow me. It's the call to discipleship. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.

It's the call to entering into the church family. The call, follow me. Because as we said last Lord's Day, the Greek word for church, if you remember it, boys and girls, do you remember it?

Ekklesia. Ekklesia. Which means called out. We are called out. And so Jesus and his disciples, they were a church family because Jesus called them out.

He called them to himself. He said to each and every one of them, follow me. Follow me. And tonight, we're a church family.

[8 : 35] We're a church family because Jesus has called us out. He has called us to himself. He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

He has said to us, follow me. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. But you know what I love about this family meeting of Jesus and his disciples?

What I love about it is that all the members of this family are so, so different. They are all so different. Because there was within this church family, those whom we have mentioned, there was Peter.

Peter. Peter, we all know him. The first thing we think about Peter, he's the one who denied Jesus. Then there's Andrew, his brother, also a fellow fisherman. There was James and John, who were also brothers.

They were also fishermen. But James and John, they were known as the sons of thunder. They had a temper. Then there was Matthew. Boys and girls, Matthew, the author of the gospel.

[9 : 39] He's also known elsewhere as Levi. He was a tax collector. He counted money. And he counted money and collected money from the Jews on behalf of the Roman government.

But tax collectors, if you remember Zacchaeus, tax collectors were known for hiking up all the taxes and profiting a pocket, pocketing a profit. And so Matthew, he would have been this guy in the congregation who most people in the community would have disliked or even detested because he used to be a tax collector.

What's more is when you look at all the disciples, Matthew's brother was called James. He's often referred to as James the Less, probably because we know less about him. But what we do know about this James the Less is that he was Matthew's younger brother because both of them were told were the sons of a man called Alphaeus.

More than that, you look through the disciples, the list of the disciples that are in the gospels. There was Judas, not Judas Iscariot, but this Judas, he was also known as Thaddeus, or later called Jude because he didn't want to be known as a Judas after what Judas did.

He was also the brother of James the Less and Matthew. So there's lots of brothers within this church family. Then there was Philip and Nathanael who were again brothers.

[11:04] Philip was the first person to introduce his brother to Jesus. He introduced Nathanael to Jesus, but Nathanael was a skeptic because he said, can anything good come out of Nazareth?

There was also within this church family, there was Thomas or Didymus, the twin. We don't know who his twin was, but Thomas was better known to us as Doubting Thomas.

There was then Simon the Zealot. He's regarded by most people as a Canaanite terrorist, and he's also part of the church family. And then there's Judas Iscariot, the well-known traitor.

And yet he started off as the church treasurer. He was the man who loved money more than Jesus.

And you know, you look at this church family, and you see, well, it's a real mixed bag, isn't it?

A real mixed bag. And you wonder, and you look at them, there's these 12 men with Jesus. And you think, how on earth are they going to turn the world upside down with the gospel?

[12:11] How are they going to do it? Because surely you'd need educated men with wisdom.

Surely you'd need evangelists and preachers and teachers, not fishermen and tax collectors and terrorists and skeptics.

Not men with tempers and deniers and doubters and deserters and a betrayer in the background.

What good are they going to do? And yet the amazing thing about the church of Jesus Christ is just what Paul says in 1 Corinthians.

God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the strong.

God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the wise.

Despite our diversity and despite our maybe dysfunctional aspects at times, this is our family meeting. This is our family meeting.

[13:35] And we're all one in Christ Jesus. We're all one in Christ Jesus. So our family meeting.

Then secondly, our family membership.

Our family membership. Read at verse 19. The disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said to them, Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me.

You know, I love the image and the illustration that's given of the church as a family. That as we were seeing last Lord's Day, we are adopted and accepted into the family of God.

We're named and numbered as the children of God. But I love it even more so because, as we see with this church family meeting, the membership of this family was so different.

[14:36] It was so diverse. And like it is with our own personal families. As much as we might want to sometimes, you can't choose your family. You can't change your family.

And sometimes there are family members that we are delighted to see. And sometimes there are family members that we dread to see. And our church family can be like that too.

Yet despite the differences, the diversity, and the dysfunctional aspects, this is our church family, and this is our family meeting. But it's not all of our family membership.

It's not all of our family membership. We're told in verse 20 that the family membership who sat at the family meal with Jesus was twelve. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.

As the twelve disciples gathered for their family meeting, all the family members were present at the family meal. No one was missing.

[15 : 40] No one was sitting at home watching online. No one was too busy to be there. No one was doing their own thing and going their own way. They were all there.

And by and large, they all wanted to be there because it was a family meeting. And they were members of that church family. Likewise, this is our family meeting.

This is our family gathering. But not all of our family membership is present. Of course, there are those in our church family who are struggling with sickness.

There are others who are aged and infirm. There are those who are housebound, hospitalized, or in homes. And these people, they'd love and long to be here and part of our family meeting.

But there are others in our family membership who could and who should be here. But they stay away. We don't know why they stay away.

[16 : 39] Some could be referred to, as I've heard it before, half-day hearers. Others, you wonder if they hear at all. Which raises the question, what is a church member?

What is a church member? Because we're studying the topic, love your church. So if we're to love our church as Jesus loves our church, then what does it mean to be a member of our church?

What does it mean to be a member of our church? The word membership, it means possessing the status of being a member.

Membership means possessing the status of being a member. But not just a member of a family, a member of a body. A member of a body.

Because remember, the church is not a building. The church is not a building. The church is a body. The church is not a place. The church is a people.

[17 : 41] And throughout the New Testament, when Paul speaks about church membership, as he does often, he's always talking about the importance of church membership. But when Paul speaks about church membership, he always uses the image and the illustration of the human body.

He talks about the human body in order to emphasize and explain that we're all members of a body. Where Jesus Christ, he is the head of the body, and we are the arms, or the legs, or the eyes, or the ears, or the mouth, or the hands, or the feet.

And as Paul explains, all the parts of the body, they're all different. They're all diverse from one another. They all look differently. They all act differently. And yet, they all must function together as one body.

And you know, I love what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, when he talks about the church as the body of Christ. He says, It's just as the body is one, and has many members, so it is with Christ. But if the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I do not belong to the body, that would not make it any less part of the body. There are many parts, he says, yet one body.

[18 : 57] The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. For God has so composed the body, he says, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.

And you know, it's a beautiful image and illustration that no matter how small we might think we are, or how insignificant we might think we are, each member is important, and each member is integral to the body of Christ.

Therefore, we must function together as the body of Christ. And you know, in his book, Devoted to God's Church, another book I started reading on holiday, and I haven't finished it yet.

In his book, Devoted to God's Church, Sinclair Ferguson, he highlights the importance of church membership. And he writes, when the body is working properly, it is the most beautiful thing in the world.

[20 : 14] It's the most beautiful thing in the world to belong to the church and to love the church. This leads us, he says, to an important question. Boys and girls, the important question.

What qualifies you to be a member of this church? What qualifies you to be a member of this church? And my friend, not just the boys and girls, I want everybody to listen to the answer that Sinclair Ferguson gives.

What qualifies you to be a member of this church? The basic answer, he says, the basic answer is the same as what qualifies you for heaven.

What qualifies you to be a member of this church is the same as what qualifies you for entrance into heaven. Faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Faith in Jesus Christ alone. And I want to be clear on this. What qualifies you to be a member of the church?

[21 : 15] It's not about being good enough. It's not about knowing enough. It's not about doing enough. Because the truth of the matter is, as every member in the congregation will say, you'll never be good enough.

You'll never know enough. You'll never do enough. That's why church membership is all about faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. Faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

And you know, when someone comes to join our family membership, when someone comes to profess their faith, and they meet with the elders, the elders, by the way, they're not harsh and hard. They're actually very gentle, very gracious, very friendly, some of them anyway. But you know, when you come and meet with the elders and join our family membership, you're asked six questions.

You're asked six questions of affirmation and accountability. There's six questions which help you confess and profess your faith in Jesus Christ.

[22 : 19] The first question, for those who have professed their faith in the last number of years, you'll remember, why have you come? That's your first question. Why are you here?

And your answer, very simply, is the opening line of Psalm 116. I love the Lord. That's your qualification for being there. I love the Lord.

The next five questions are vows. Vows that you're making, promises that you're making to the congregation, and promises that the congregation is making to you. Question one, do you acknowledge the Bible to be the Word of God and your only guide in all matters of faith and conduct?

So do you believe the Bible to be true? Do you confess God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in Scripture, to be your God? I would assume you do.

Do you profess faith in Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners and as your Savior and Lord? Do you promise that depending upon God's promised help, you will faithfully obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and to love His people within the fellowship of the church?

[23 : 26] And then the last vow. Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the government of this church to participate faithfully in its worship, ministry, and support, and heed its discipline?

And you know, as members of our church family, that's what we have vowed to. That's what we vow to. And the thing is, if you can answer yes to all of these vow questions, then you should meet with the elders to confess and profess your faith in Jesus Christ.

Because the church, it's not a building. It's a body. It's the body of Christ. It's the body of Jesus Christ. And so we see our family meeting, our family membership, and lastly, our family meal. Our family meal. Now look again at verse 26. Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat.

This is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[24 : 44] So as the disciples sat down with Jesus to participate in and to partake of the Passover meal, this was, in many ways, their last supper together. This was the last supper before Jesus was crucified as the Passover lamb for his people.

But you know what I find really interesting is that prior to instituting the Lord's Supper for the first time, I believe that Jesus fenced the Lord's table. Jesus fenced the Lord's table, because during the Passover meal, Jesus announces, as we read, he announced that there would be, that there was someone sitting at the table who was going to betray him.

And immediately, we read that all the disciples, they start examining themselves, as Paul encourages us to do in 1 Corinthians 11. They all start examining themselves.

They all say, Is it I, Lord? Is it I, Lord? Is it I, Lord? And then verse 23, he answered, He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.

The Son of Man goes, as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

[25 : 58] Judas, who would betray him, answered, Is it I, Rabbi? He said to him, You have said so. And you know, I think that's important because when the Lord fenced the Lord's table, it didn't matter that there were doubters there or deniers or deserters.

They were all welcome. But betrayers were banned. Doubters, deniers, and deserters were all welcome. Betrayers were banned.

And my friend, you might be a doubter. You might be a denier. You might be a deserter. Like Thomas, you might doubt your fitness, like many of us do. Like Thomas, you might doubt your fitness or faithfulness as a Christian.

Like Peter, you might deny Jesus by not living as outwardly or as boldly with your faith as you know you should. And like the other disciples, you might desert Jesus on occasion for fear of other people and what other people will say.

And yet, by the example set here, doubters, deniers, and deserters were welcome to sit at the Lord's table. Doubters, deniers, and deserters were welcome to sit at the Lord's table.

[27 : 18] Because the thing is, we're all doubters. We're all deniers. And in some cases, we're all deserters.

We all faint. We all fail. We're all faithless. We all let the Lord down. We all sin and come short. That's why the Lord's Supper is described as a means of grace.

It's a means of grace. It's a means by which our faith is focused upon Jesus. It's a means by which our assurance is affirmed by Jesus.

It's a means by which our salvation is strengthened by sitting at the Lord's table with Jesus. My friend, the Lord's Supper, it's not for good people or perfect people.

It's not for people who have it all together. and think that they're better than everyone else. No, the Lord's Supper is very simply for broken people living broken lives in a broken world.

[28 : 23] As we said before, the church is not a museum of good people. No, this place, this building, this gathering, our family, is a hospital for the broken. It's a hospital for the broken.

And that's why we come to the Lord's table. We don't come to the Lord's table thinking we're great and there's something good in us. No, we come to the Lord's table because in coming to the Lord's table, we are reminded and reassured that our Jesus was broken in order to bear our griefs and carry all our sorrows.

Our Jesus was broken. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He was substituted and sacrificed in our place as our Passover lamb.

And you know, by coming to the Lord's table and participating in and partaking of the Lord's Supper, which we will do, God willing, next Lord's Day morning, it's when we come, that's when we experience and enjoy that koinonia, that fellowship, that communion, that sharing.

Because it's fellowship with Christ and fellowship with other Christians. It's communion with the Savior and communion with the saints. It's sharing in the simple elements of bread and wine that are there to strengthen us and sustain us in this wilderness journey.

[29 : 57] They are our manna in the morning and our quantity of quail at night. That's what's to keep us going in the wilderness journey. And so, friends, we've been encouraged to love our church because Jesus loves our church.

Jesus gave himself for our church. But we're also being encouraged as we're looking at this passage this evening to participate in our family meeting and be part of our family membership and partake in our family meal.

We're to participate in our family meeting. We're to gather together. We're to be part of our family membership. We're to come out on the side of Jesus and we're to partake in our family meal.

By sitting at the Lord's table. And we partake in the family meal as we remember Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb. And boys and girls, what is commanded in the Lord's Supper?

What does Jesus say? Do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance remembrance of me? Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

[31 : 15] Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for the encouragements that we find in Thy Word.

That we are invited and encouraged to come to Thy table. and to come not because there's anything good in us, but because God is good and God is gracious and God is great.

That He has done in us and for us exceedingly, abundantly above all, more than we could ever ask or ever think. And we thank Thee that He invites us to come and be strengthened, to sustain us in this wilderness journey.

That whether we are a doubter or a denier or a deserter, whether we are struggling in our sin or struggling with being a failure or fainting and failing day by day, we give thanks for the Lord's

Supper that it is there for us as a means of grace.

O Lord, watch over us, we pray. Encourage us as a church family. Encourage us, Lord, to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Help us to look out for one another.

[32 : 25] Help us to bear one another's burden. Help us, Lord, we pray, to do everything to Thy glory and ultimately to the furtherance of Thy kingdom because Jesus is the head of the body and we are the body, one body in Christ Jesus.

Go before us then, we pray, into a new week. Bless us, we ask. Prepare us for the Lord's Day, next Lord's Day, if we're spared to see it, that everything we do would be to Thy glory.

Cleanse us then, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Now we're going to sing, in conclusion, we're going to sing the words of Psalm 116.

Psalm 116, page 396 in the Scottish Psalter, picking up at verse 13. Before we sing, I'll ask the questions.

Some of them are delighted, some of them dread these questions. Okay, question one. What did Matthew do before he followed Jesus? Tax collector.

[33 : 38] So he collected tax for the Roman government. Okay, question two. Important question, very important question. What qualifies you to be a member of this church?

Faith in Jesus Christ. That's it. It's your only qualification. Faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. What is commanded in the Lord's Supper? Do, yep, do this in remembrance of me.

That's what Jesus says. Do this in remembrance of me. So that's what's commanded in the Lord's Supper. It's a command so we're not to be disobedient. We're commanded to remember the Lord's death until he comes.

So we're singing Psalm 116, verse 13. And as we said, this is one of the Hallel Psalms that was sung during the Passover meal. And as they're singing, they're singing about a cup, the cup of salvation.

I'll of salvation take the cup. On God's name will I call. I'll pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all. Dear in God's sight is his saint's death.

[34 : 54] Thy servant Lord am I. Thy servant sure. Thine handmaid son. My bands thou didst untie. We'll sing down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 116.

To God's praise. I, Lord, salvation take the cup.

On God's name will I call. I'll pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all.

Dear in God's sight is his saint's death. Thy servant Lord am I.

Thy servant sure. Thine amiss of my pants thou didst untie.

[36 : 17] Thy worth ofinooning in his maid vorimees melody Oh! with how sa', God's name shalliliary or ingend of filled heaven tribal weapons all.

Now to the Lord before his people all Within the courts of God's own house Within the midst of thee O city of Jerusalem Praise to the Lord give me The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all now and forevermore Amen