

# Communion Service - The Lord's Table

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] bow our heads briefly in prayer as we turn to scripture heavenly father we ask and pray that your spirit would be with us as we look into this passage of the living word and we do rejoice today that it is your word that it's living that it is most clearly understood in the word incarnate jesus christ the one who communicates and speaks who reveals himself in his person in his character and in his work on the cross in his death and in his resurrection and ascension and in the great hope of his return we thank you for these truths and we thank you for jesus christ being truth and we pray and ask that you would bless our study around your word and may your spirit breathe life into each of us both hearers and preacher alike to receive what god will have us know and be comforted by challenged by encouraged by and moved by from his word for jesus sake amen i'd like to return to the passage that we read in luke's gospel chapter 14 particularly the last well not not particularly we're going to look at this chapter and recognize what jesus is saying i've entitled this the dinner party uh because it's all about feasting it's all about eating this whole chapter and uh even the previous chapter where jesus speaks about the narrow door speaks about being outside not being able to participate in the meal and uh he is saying in that passage where we didn't read apart from that one verse in chapter 13 that jesus is talking about becoming a christian and he says that it's uh it's like entering through a narrow door so being saved to eternal life is like entering through a narrow door that's a picture we're probably quite familiar with with in terms of the bible and its teaching and in many ways the the outworking uh the explanation of that comes in the chapter that we read together in chapter 14 and what jesus means by narrowness and the narrow door um i think we've often taken the not the word narrow and the narrow door meaning that the gospel is or the way to jesus is a it's narrow-minded it's negative and it's restrictive kind of mean-spirited it's he's in very narrow way and and god is very narrow in his thinking we we often talk about people who are narrow-minded and we think that they they're not really open and they don't really think about maybe the realities of life around them they're they're blinkered in their thinking that that's not at all what it means and that's not the meaning that jesus intends for it the narrowness that he uses in that picture and that he goes on to explain is really that there's one focus there's one way you know you know jesus himself says i am the way the truth and the life no one no one comes to the father except through me so it's narrow in that it's restrictive in that sense it's that the one way to heaven is through a relationship with jesus christ is knowing jesus christ in verse 14 and verse 20 chapter 14 sorry at verse 25 you know he says um that uh so it's not that chapter 14 it's chapter 13

at verse 25 he says um sir open the door to us and jesus answered them and said i don't know you or where you come from and he's explaining the narrowness of the doors the the explanation is that they didn't know jesus and that's where the narrowness comes in and that's why it's so important and we sit at the lord's table and we celebrate the lord's supper on the basis of knowing jesus knowing not knowing about him but knowing him as our lord and savior and that is the only basis that we have for sitting at the lord's table we have responded to that command to become a friend of jesus by accepting his salvation and as a friend of jesus we are invited then to or as i said to the children commanded to sit at his table uh in remembrance of him now this chapter that we read chapter 14 is a chapter all about feasting what it in a sense what it means to um what it means to be a christian and in in a broader illustration what it means to sit at god's table and live as as god's child lives as a live as a children as a child of god and uh that's what i'm going to focus on for the first part of the sermon and then i focus a little bit on on the cost uh to jesus that allows us to sit at the table and but we often talk in our particular context about fencing the lord's table and that idea of putting a fence up that's the idea behind fencing the lord's table it's putting a fence up and it's not a biblical term you wouldn't find that term anywhere in the bible but it does come from first

corinthians 11 which tells us to examine ourselves and for the church to have a responsibility uh to recognize that we don't participate as individuals or as people in an unworthy manner that is in a manner that doesn't recognize what it means to be god's child and what it means to have entered in at the narrow way and the responsibilities of that um it's it's a guard in a sense uh it's reminding us uh who uh ought to be at the lord's table because they have become friends with jesus and it's guarding it's guarding the table so that as we come to the lord's table we're coming in the right manner in the right spirit it's not about whether we believe or unbelieve but it's about how we're living our lives as christians primarily it's not a barrier to stop us coming to the lord's table as christians but it's guarding us as a protection against coming carelessly coming slovenly coming without recognizing and remembering what we're like in our own hearts and without recognizing the ongoing need to live out our christian lives with god's grace both in our individual lives and in our christian lives as a as a church as a family so i'm going to look at just initially what it means uh what makes his way narrow and then look at uh the experience that jesus had himself so the narrow way reminds us to that we always as christians and i think every time we come together and worship and every time we read the bible uh we recognize that we're always being asked to look into our own hearts not not not to look at everyone else but look into our own hearts to acknowledge jesus to acknowledge our need of him and to serve him and when jesus speaks about the narrow way here he's responding particularly to a pharisaical audience he's he's been speaking to the pharisees the religious leaders of his day who think they are good enough for god and who who are rejecting jesus and that's always that's always a temptation deep in our own soul that whether we're conscious of it or not that we feel that well we're probably good enough for god at one level or another so he speaks about different situations and he speaks he uses an illustration he uses illustrations because he's at a feast himself and then he gives parables that speak about a feast and really we're looking at the the dinner parties here that jesus is at that wasn't like heaven at all and that's the setting for jesus talking about the narrow way there's four conversations that he has that are sparked by four different interactions with people during a meal and he uses all the time this picture of feasting being at a table and it's i think it's a good reminder to us about our own hearts and about the challenge of examining ourselves and then and then participating you know that that's the emphasis in first corinthians 11 it's not not examine yourself and then run away it's not examine yourself and stay away it's examine yourself and come get right but with god as believers it's that recognition of coming to him afresh so we're reminded of several things we're reminded that we can't take our own goodness into our relationship with jesus christ and to merit salvation or or any kind of favor with him verses one to six he speaks to the pharisees because jesus heals a man who's suffering from an abnormal swelling in his body and the pharisees are annoyed with him because he does it they're experts and he's annoyed because he does it on the sabbath day and he reminds them that it's lawful to heal on the sabbath day and they remain silent when he questions them they're law experts they're knew their bible but they looked down on other people and they were very at best they were suspicious of jesus they prided themselves as law keepers and they were judgmental of others who may be broke as they saw it their interpretation of the sabbath rules but they forgot that the core of the law of god what's the core of the law of god is to love god and to love your neighbor that is the summary of all the 10 commandments and they had simply taken them out of that context and made them legalistic they couldn't see a needy man who jesus loved who was ill and who was broken they rejected him and they rejected jesus but when jesus spoke and exposed their hypocrisy they had nothing to say so we can't take our we can't think that we are good enough for god we can't think that we obey enough to deserve sitting with him and being friends with him it's nothing to do with our religious goodness not as it to do with our self-importance and verses 7 to 11 he noticed that the meal that he was at some people were going to the head of the table when they came into the meal and that that is the culture of the day that's what happened the meals were different from ours it wasn't like an ordinary table it was it's called a triclinium which is a three it was like a u-shape in a sense and the most important people all sat at the top of the u and so and the most significant guests sat beside them and that was like the lord's supper itself where those closest to jesus sat on either side of him and if you remember jesus brought judas to sit beside him there and but if you went to that top place you were saying you were an important guest at the meal and jesus is saying you don't none of us deserve a place at the lord's table none of us deserve to be close to jesus and to be friends with jesus in our own strength we recognize that we are at his table and we are friends with jesus because of the gift that he has given to us through salvation we are to be those in christ as believers who humble ourselves and who

have humbled ourselves and in many senses probably it's not a bad thing for all of us to think we are least in the kingdom of heaven there's everyone else is more important and more significant and more christ-like than me i think that was paul's attitude and it's a good attitude for us to have that we are there by god's grace we can't take our religious goodness or our self-importance and we can't take our self-interest either verses 12 to 14 he speaks about hosting a meal and only inviting your friends to that meal your brothers or sisters your relatives and neighbors so that they will invite you back and you'll be repaid for inviting them to the meal so he's taking a common uh cultural uh event and a way of doing things we and we still do it a lot we invite people to our house our friends our neighbors and maybe you know deep down we hope they'll invite us back and there'll be a repaid friendship there's nothing wrong with that at all but he's saying in terms of our relationship to jesus and our friendship with jesus and being christians that isn't the attitude that we are to have it's not about uh our relationship with jesus not about our social standing or about the favors that he can give us back because we have come to him uh as it were in terms of our attitude to god it's possible to welcome jesus into our lives as our friend and as our savior but sometimes we can do it because it seems impressive or because we think he's going to be an influential friend to have and we want him to bless us because we have done this great thing for him by becoming christians and i think deep down we often have a mentality that and we see it often in the bible also uh the question or people will ask that question we often ask it i've come to jesus i believe in jesus why why am i being blessed why isn't life easier for me um why isn't jesus and we sometimes feel jesus ought to be indebted to us because we have come to him in the same way that guests who come to our house for a meal are indebted to us and we want the favor written we think god owes us a favor because we've come to faith and we get angry with him if we suffer and we get angry with him if things don't go the way we want or if he doesn't answer our prayers the way we think he should answer them because he's indebted to us because we have come if we've given up everything to follow him and jesus is saying we can't take our self-interest into our walk with him and into our salvation we are saved by grace it's his gift and we are his servants and we have been given what we can never repay and then lastly in terms of the four responses he gives to the narrow way and all of them are dealing with our self-centered hearts and that battle that we have with that self wells up within us all the time wells up within me all the time and we need jesus christ and grace to deal with that the last one he speaks about is that we can't take our self-centeredness and this is an interesting parable the last section from verse 15 well known to us the parable of great banquet when lots of invitations

go out people accept the invitations but then when it when time comes to come to the meal to come to the banquet they all of one accord begin to make excuse as we remember it in the authorized version and that's an interesting parable that jesus tells in response to the guest that he's sitting beside who cries out very loudly and says oh blessed is the one who will lead to the feast in the kingdom of god and jesus says well maybe it will not be the people you think and it's a very challenging passage this because it reminds us that jesus is speaking of those um who liked the idea of jesus and who liked the idea of being invited by jesus to the great banquet and who would maybe even love to be in heaven and be in his company but for whom jesus was simply not a priority he was not a priority and when it when it came to the cost of being in his presence and belonging to him he was way down their list way down their list of priorities and they give in this well-known parable and i'm only skimming it they give pitiful excuses for not being at the feast with jesus christ in reality yes they've seen the invitation and they love the the idea of belonging to jesus and being invited to his feast but in reality far too much hassle in a sense that all the excuses that they give it would be like us say well i i can't i can't go i can't you know people say well i can't go i'm drying my hair just now well it doesn't apply to me but it would apply to many other people i've got too many other things to do you know but insignificant and and petty reason you know we find it in this parable material possessions crops and livestock love and relationships getting married the in other words jesus is saying the good things of the ordinary good things of life the things that make up life when these things become what we live for when they become ultimate when they become idols when we have no thought then for the giver when these are the things material possessions career relationships when they become what we look for for happiness and contentment and peace and and meaning then we've lost sight of jesus christ and we've lost sight of his significance because it's self-centered and it's moving away from the gospel and there's much more in that parable but what i think in terms of fencing the table as we speak about that there's that challenge for all of us to let the light of jesus shine into the sometimes the religious reliance our goodness our

self-importance our self-interest or our self-centeredness and just throw ourselves anew on jesus and on his finished work and in his grace so um what does it mean then for us to recognize and know and remember jesus christ at the lord's table uh today well what jesus the narrow way that he speaks about is reminding us of two things in conclusion uh the first is that we we come to christ with nothing that's what then ultimately what the narrow way is all about uh when he says that you know uh narrow is the way uh that leads to salvation and uh that is a picture of uh jesus teaching that we have nothing that we can bring and what he's reminding us of as we've seen in these parables and these teachings we have nothing in an ongoing way nothing to offer him in payment for our salvation nothing to offer there's nothing we

[ 20 : 18 ] can bring to god that will pay the price for our failure for our lack of love for him and our lack of love for our neighbor that's that's the essence of the ten commandments they are relational and they say do you love me and do you love me we can't do we have nothing that we can do because we can't fulfill these laws perfectly only jesus did these and fulfilled these laws we have broken these divine laws and thought and word and indeed we have no hope of reconciliation with god in our own strength we have no hope of living forever in our own strength or being friends with god on our own terms in our own way we are broken and we have broken hearts and death and hell is all that we deserve there is absolutely nothing that we can bring and that's a costly examination we need to make of ourselves and remind ourselves of it at the table that selfishness and self-centeredness separates us from god and the narrowness is the narrowness of knowing that there is only in jesus christ and through jesus christ that we can be saved therefore we recognize that we come with nothing but the great part of this and this is what i really like is that uh we can do that because he has done everything so we are sitting at the lord's table and we are remembering as christians because we know and we experience and understand that he has done everything on our behalf and there's just two things i would say about this first is that he has drunk in the kind of feasting imagery maybe he has drunk himself a terrible cup um john 18 and in matthew 26 verse 39 john 18 verse 11 jesus speaks about drinking from the cup you know you know he says to peter no will i not drink from this cup that the lord that the father has given me and he says i must drink this cup i must drink it to his dregs he drank a terrible cup um that's why he came that is why jesus came and that was planned from before the creation of the world this cup that jesus takes the image that he uses uh and the cup that he is drinking is an absolutely unique cup nobody ever has drunk that cup and it was so frightening to jesus the son of god that he sweated drops of blood in gethsemane as he faced the reality of it people say that that was miraculous others say that he was so stressed by the reality of what lay ahead that capillaries in his forehead burst and that blood would mix with the sweat because of the physical intensity of what lay ahead for him the mystery in that cup of uh drinking what what was it he was drinking god's wrath that's that jeremiah speaks about the cup of god's wrath he was drinking the punishment for every single one of our sins and our wrongdoings and and that is really important today isn't it uh sometimes we don't think about that but we all need that to be true we all need god to be a just god who doesn't just you know forget about it we we all need that as a parent here today if your daughter is raped you know you need justice for that we know if our our closest friend or neighbor is murdered we know that justice matters and we know in our own heart it wells up within our own hearts we feel a sense of

injustice lots of injustice lots of times and the great thing about god is that god says he is a just god and it's the mystery of bringing together god's justice and god's amazing love because we need that as well it comes together in the drinking of that cup that's what happens in the drinking of the cup now there's no other way that his justice to deal with our sin and his love for us dealing with the love and concern that he had for us could be met unless he himself drank the cup in other words unless he himself paid the price for our sins because there was no way back for us god's wrath separates us eternally from him and from life only jesus christ is great enough and strong enough and just enough and loving enough to drink that cup of judgment and pay the price fully because he's our substitute and he is in drinking that cup he is punished in our place it's an unspeakable mystery and i feel cheap even talking about it because it seems so incredibly mysterious the unspeakable taste of god's wrath jesus christ drank it to the dregs on the cross and that picture is of feasting it's brutal it's a cup of death he drank the cup of death so that we can drink symbolically but also in reality the cup of life that we live because he that that is the significance of what jesus has done we are forgiven and united to christ as the author of life so that you know even though we're getting old and fading away on the outside and the inside we're being renewed and even though we die yet we will

live these are the great promises that he gives us so we can't do anything because he has done everything he's drunk the terrible cup and he's drunk that terrible cup all alone and that's where he takes the narrowness we speak about the narrow door and it's narrow because it's exclusive and he took that punishment absolutely on his own mark 15 34 says my god my god why have you forsaken me at the end of three hours of utter and complete darkness the sun in the sky wouldn't even shine on the experience of jesus on the cross a cry god of dereliction martin luther is supposed to have looked at this cry locked his door for three days and three nights to try and prayerfully come to understand what it means at the end of it said god forsaken of god who can understand it but it's no feast for christ that there's no there's no one to accompany him he's he's drinking and eating this wrath absolutely alone there's no table for jesus christ there's only a cross and there's one bitter cup he's not sharing it with anyone there's utter darkness and he's completely and excruciatingly alone and he's thirsty on the cross as if the living water himself was being drained of life no light no love no companionship no sense of the father's pleasure the very opposite of what makes a good feast what makes a great time together and christ did this so that we can accept his invitation and sit at his table and i do think it's good when we celebrate the lord's supper to be reminded of what it means to be in christ and it's a time where in the peace and quiet i really envy the peace and quiet that you have here when you're worshiping even when we're doing the lord's supper in edinburgh uh there's bagpipes playing outside and there's noise and traffic so enjoy and value and benefit from the meditative time that you can have with the peace and quiet at the lord's table remember what he's done be refreshed in your soul renew your vows and look remember that we look for it's not it's not a funereal remembrance uh we're remembering his death but we remember his death because he's living because he's ascended to the father and we do until he comes in other words he's coming back so we look we remember that this feast which is symbolic of the best is yet to come without uh any doubt the best is yet to come um seek the holy spirit to put to death the selfishness that remains in all of us and the wrong attitudes that sometimes we have and allow him to do the impossible which is to transform your heart and my heart not just in here but in your daily walk with your family with your neighbors with your colleagues uh to know that you're a new creation and uh that christ is in you the hope of glory amen that's uh bow our heads in prayer lord god bless us as we uh continue to think about you and continue to celebrate together uh fellowship and grace and the glory of jesus even just give us a glimpse uh from your word of some of what jesus experienced on our behalf greater love has no man than this that he laid down his friend his life for his friends and i have called you friends he says to those who have come by faith and who uh recognize the significance of needing a savior so maybe respond and rejoice and enjoy our time together this morning and continue to amen so as i mentioned earlier uh really the fencing of the table as we would call it traditionally has been done really through the sermon and uh through looking at uh the narrow way uh jesus being the narrow way but the great thing about the lord's table is that is it's the lord's table it's not any denominational table it's not a closed table for just uh the people who live here as it were and the invitation is to come to the lord's table if jesus christ is your friend and uh if you put your trust in jesus if you recognize that what happened at calvary is the most relevant and crucial moment in history and one in which you are intimately involved through jesus taking being your substitute and taking your sin one where christ took all your guilt and death and dealt with it and if you trust in him for that however fragile you feel your trust might be but if you trust in him for that for your life and for your eternity your place is at the table your place is with him at the lord's table it's not an invitation it's a command and we are commanded to follow him and the cost that that involves and if you're not a believer uh i would love to challenge you to think about jesus afresh you may know a lot more about jesus than i do from his word in terms of the facts of jesus you may not know very much but the interesting thing is he knows and he knows about you and i would challenge and encourage you to think again and afresh about jesus marian last night uh shared her own testimony and uh shared the verse that was in the online bible devotional uh for yesterday and it's obviously the same devotional that i use um whoever believes in the son has eternal life but whoever rejects the son uh will not see life for god's wrath remains on him um and that speaks into god's justice but also speaks into his love that he wants us to recognize that we if we believe in the son his wrath is removed it's perfectly right isn't it everyone will have a cup to drink it'll either be a cup of life or a cup of judgment and the cup of judgment is when his wrath remains on us because we haven't dealt with our sin and that will separate us from him forever that's why it matters so much and uh interestingly uh today's verse uh on the same uh devotional uh is the verse that i also mentioned

last night from romans 10 10 for if you with your heart for if for it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved and that is the simple message of the gospel that i challenge you to consider again afresh today bow our heads in prayer and give thanks father god we give thanks for this opportunity to be together we thank you for the lord's supper this great sacrament that you instituted on the eve of your own death as something to help us in our christian walk something to teach us about you both in what we watch what we see what we visualize and what we taste and what we eat just practical material reminders of what who we are and who you are and what you have done for us we remind ourselves of the personal nature of eating nobody else can eat for us and it is a great sign of taking jesus personally for us as our savior not some kind of generic worldwide savior but one who died on the cross for my sins and we take him symbolically by the eating of his or the eating of bread and wine symbolizing his body and bloodshed for us but we also do it together we're not to do it alone but as a people once we were not a people but now we are and we pray that we would be reminded that we are one people and that we are one in christ and that in loving god through christ we are to love one another with all our stumbling failures and mistakes and uh ugliness that still has to be rooted out from us so we pray and ask for humility and for a self-denial in our hearts and attitudes today and we thank you for the bread and the wine which is here which has been set apart for this use and we ask and pray that as we participate and as others look on that the presence and power of god in the spirit would be with us that we would be nourished that we would be challenged that we would be comforted and that we would be convicted of our need for jesus and we see your great provision your great love and your great longing for us all to remain to come to you and to remain in you we ask these things in jesus name amen so we have our warrant for celebrating together from first corinthians chapter 11 and in that chapter where paul is correcting some of the abuses that were happening in that early church he reminds them that on the night that our lord was betrayed that he gave thanks which is what we have done and he said he took bread and he said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me and the same manner after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me as often as you eat this bread and drink this what you do you proclaim the lord's death until he comes and there's always a really important uh perspective when we celebrate the lord's supper and i mentioned it earlier which is that we should always celebrate and remember uh with a view to looking forward that's a really important element uh until he comes it's it's not it's not a funeral service that we are remembering a living savior uh who has instituted this temporarily until he comes and the whole concept of feast thing goes right through the bible it's it's an incredibly strong motif throughout the whole bible and takes us right through to revelation to uh revelation chapter 19 where he speaks about the wedding supper of the lamb and that picture of being with jesus christ and the church being the bride and christ uh being the groom and the redeemer of those people and it i have the privilege and and then just the nature of the congregation of all the great young people that come down from places like harris uh and end up meeting their partner uh and so i do have done a lot of weddings and christian weddings are great really great and enjoyable events um and so many non-christian weddings as well of course uh but there's that sense of of happiness and uh hope and and uh joy and coming together um and jesus uses that picture deliberately uh of heaven and we look forward to it being uh far greater than we can ever imagine a place of light of warmth of nourishment of celebration of food and wine uh in a new creation uh ditch the ideas of strumming harps of clouds that is highly unbiblical and not very attractive uh we are going to be in a new creation uh we are going to be in a new creation new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness and christ will be there and he will redeem and buy back everything that has been broken and lost to sin including the creation and we rejoice and look forward to all that and then i'm thinking of the glorious future that is only uh ours in him and i'm just can i just finish with a picture and i apologize if it's not a very good [ 40 : 40 ] picture it's a human picture uh but i would like you to apply it spiritually and um it's gleaned from biblical images and but there's only a very imperfect don't criticize me it's only a very imperfect picture but it might help stimulate some thought in terms of grace and christ and evangelism can you just imagine for a moment as we close that your family has arranged a glorious feast and they've arranged it in a beautiful marvelous country mansion on a freezing cold winter's night and they brought in the best caterers that are in the country the greatest food and wine that is possible wonderful musicians all your friends and your cousins and your mum and dad and your granny and all the people that you love are there there's a roaring fire uh amazing decor in this

place beautiful bedrooms feather duvets everything that you could ask for for an evening of uh joy and celebration and as you see everything being organized you're surprised by the people that come in you're amazed they've managed to invite and bring uh these people that you love that you thought you would never see again and it just seems perfect endless provisions coming to make it one absolutely brilliant night nothing is missing whatsoever it's a complete dream just as you're about to enter the door closes and you're on the outside and it's dark and it's cold and you're all alone that is hell and that's maybe just a tiny glimpse of what christ experienced on the cross so that no one ever here needs to experience that and the plea is to consider if you're not a christian a great invitation to be with jesus and to know him and trust in him and if you have already done that to not treat that selfishly but to realize that god uses you to share it with those who don't have go from here to share with your neighbors your friends your family your colleagues with gentleness and respect and with a consistent life of love and of holiness and of prayer for urgency share that great gospel of jesus christ we'll pray briefly and then sing together father god we ask and pray that you would bless your work bless uh some of these imaginative thoughts we pray as we find uh so many pictures in the bible uh of heaven and hell of life and death explained by jesus and by the writers in so many different ways in order to just help us to try and grasp these realities and we pray that through your spirit we would do so give us really generous hearts to love you to love one another and especially to love those who don't know you and to show them not just individually but as a people uh the love that makes that has changed our hearts and transformed us from the inside out and is helping us to be honest and uh genuine failed often but seeking forgiveness and grace and growth and give us a great love to share jesus and the reality of jesus of those who don't know you time is short opportunities are few we're getting older and we pray that you would give us uh not a daft urgency but a gracious and holy and uh patient urgency that cries out to the living god and waits on him and responds when opportunities come and help us not to try and ram them down people's throats in a way that will put them off but simply to live in such a way that our lives are attracted and therefore when the questions are asked we have a reason for the hope that's within us to share continue with us as we close and we thank you for all who are here again especially the children and we pray and ask your blessing on them as they have watched and may jesus become real that he's not already in their hearts and lives amen