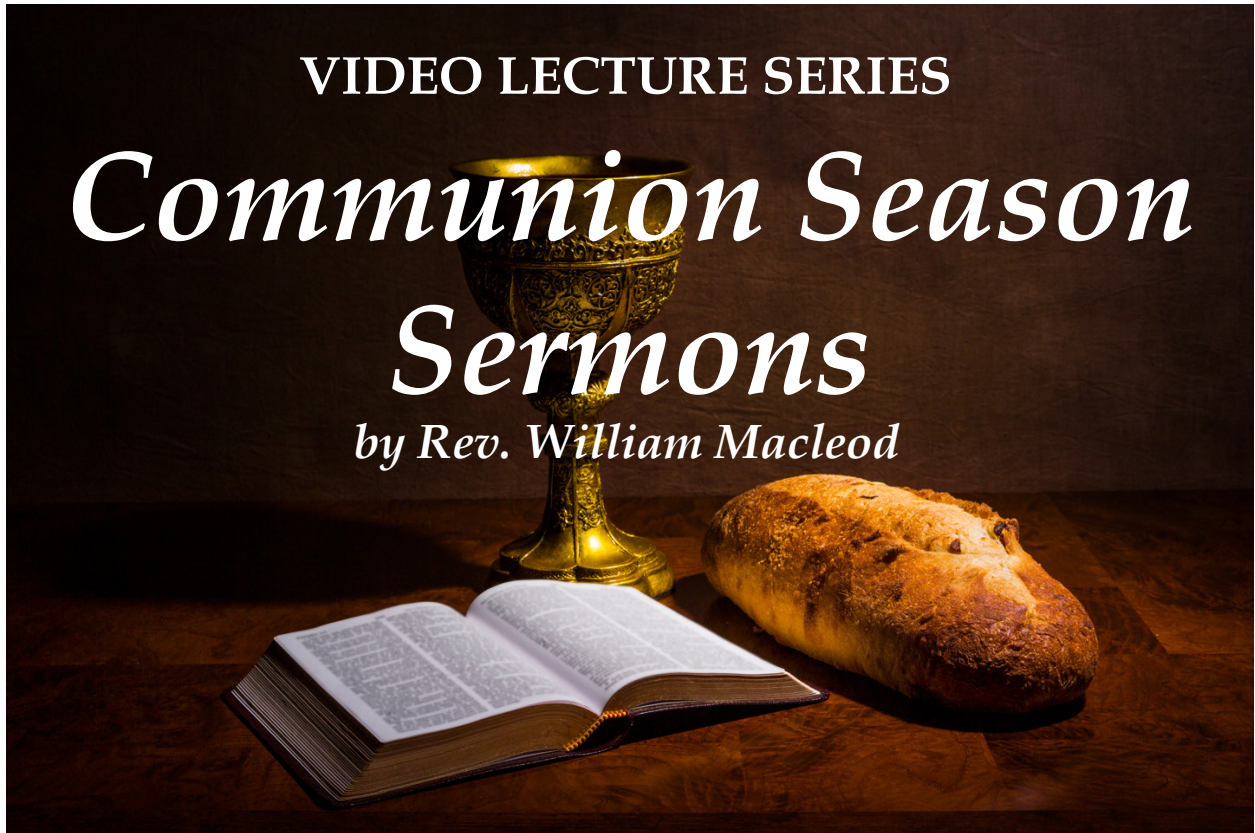


VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

Communion Season *Sermons*

by Rev. William Macleod



Introduction

Luke 22:14-20



The John Knox Institute
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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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Communion Season Sermons

*An Introduction and 7 Sermons
by Rev. William Macleod*

Introduction (Luke 22:14–20)

Sermon #1. Pardon My Sins (Psalm 51:9–10)

Sermon #2. Prepare Me for Thy Presence (Psalm 24:3–4)

Sermon #3. Examine Yourself (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Sermon #4. Mary's Great Love (Mark 14:3)

Sermon #5. The Awful Cup (Luke 22:42) / Communion Address

Sermon #6. Salvation for Pharisees and Prodigals
(Luke 15:29–30)

Sermon #7. Christ is Coming Again (Revelation 22:20–21)

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Introduction (Luke 22:14-20)

Turn with me to the Scriptures, to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 22, and we'll read verses 14 to 20: "And when the hour was come, he sat down"—that is, Jesus sat down—"and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Amen. May God bless to us the reading of his Word.

So, this series of sermons which follows will take the pattern of a traditional Scottish Communion weekend. Today's sermon will be a kind of introduction to the others. Some churches celebrate Communion every weekend or maybe every fortnight, or once a month. It's tagged on at the end of a regular service, and sometimes it has very little meaning. It's almost like a ritual. In Scotland, from the time of the Covenanters in the seventeenth century, a unique and blessed tradition has developed. Now, many traditions are bad, but not all. Some are very good, and profitable and helpful, and we believe that there is much that the modern evangelical church worldwide can learn from the traditional Scottish Communion.

First of all, we notice that Communion is an institution of Christ. We read together there in Luke chapter 22, of Christ instituting Communion. We could read it again, verses 19 and 20: "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Now, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is very helpful in the way it explains many of our doctrines. Question #92, in the *Shorter Catechism*, asks "What is a sacrament?" And the answer is: "A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers." That means that there's only two proper sacraments. The Roman Catholic Church, as you know, has seven sacraments. But Christ only instituted two: baptism, and the Lord's Supper. And these two correspond to the two sacraments of the Old Testament: circumcision, the sacrament of initiation into the people of God, the church of God; and passover. Really, there's only one church, Old Testament and New Testament. There's only one way of salvation, one covenant of grace, one Savior. The only way we can be saved is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. That was true in Old Testament times too. They had to look forward to the coming of Christ, and put their trust in the Christ who was going to die at Calvary, just as we look back to Calvary, and trust in his shed blood.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, who was under the Old Testament dispensation, “You must be born again. Except a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (John 3:3). That was true in Old Testament times too. We’re justified by faith. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight (Romans 3:20). No flesh can ever be justified in the sight of God by the works of the law. So, in Old Testament times, they were justified by faith, just as we are today.

Now, what is the meaning, then, of the Lord’s Supper? Again, looking at the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question #96—“What is the Lord’s Supper?” The answer is: “The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.” Perhaps I should repeat that, because it’s such an excellent definition: “The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner”—not simply by eating bread and drinking wine in an earthly way—“but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.” So that gives us then the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

Next, how often should the Lord’s Supper be observed? As we said before, some observe it weekly. But notice that the first Lord’s Supper was instituted at the end of the Passover. It was very much joined to the Passover, and indeed, takes over from the Old Testament Passover. Now, the passover was a very special feast. It was held once a year. And the Israelites from all over the country were to come to Jerusalem, the place that God had appointed, and there, they were to celebrate the Passover. In the Passover, they were remembering their time in the land of Egypt when they were slaves. God would not allow Pharaoh to keep them in slavery, and sent Moses to them, saying, “Let my people go.” But Pharaoh wouldn’t let them go. So eventually God sent his plagues, and finally the destroying angel was to go through the land. The only way they could protect themselves was as God had appointed. A lamb had to be killed, and its blood was put upon the doorposts and lintel of their houses. And then they were safe inside the house, and they would eat that lamb—the lamb, of course, that was pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The destroying angel went through the land of Egypt. And God said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over that house.” Every other house that didn’t have the blood on the doorposts, the destroying angel entered and killed the firstborn. So, it was a wonderful deliverance. And that night, the children of Israel left the land of Egypt for freedom, and for the promised land.

How often should it be celebrated? Well, Passover was celebrated just once a year. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, in verses 25 and 26, Paul refers to the institution of the Passover, and he uses the words of Christ, “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” As oft as ye do it, or as often as ye eat, so it’s not specified how often we should hold the sacrament. The danger of holding it weekly is that it becomes meaningless. The Passover was held just once a year, so the Scottish pattern has tended to be to have the Lord’s Supper twice a year, but there’s no rule with regard to that. It’s as often as the elders feel that it’s edifying and appropriate.

Because it’s infrequent, it can be a very special event. And in Scotland, it became a kind of Christian conference that they held usually twice a year. Visiting preachers would be asked to come along and share in the preaching. Christians from neighboring congregations would gather, and they would stay in the homes of the congregation, and enjoy the hospitality of the congregation,

and also attend the services, and talk about the things of God and of Christian fellowship. So the pattern then often was to hold it two times a year.

Next, we notice that it's a holy ordinance. There should be a solemnity about it. Our God is holy, and we need more of a sense of the holiness of God in our modern churches; more of a sense of awe in God's presence. Remember Isaiah getting a vision of God: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." And the holy seraphims above it, and each one crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God of hosts, so the whole earth is full of his glory." And Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! for...I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:1-5). There's a great sense of the holiness, the awesomeness of God. Or we think of Revelation chapter 1, where the Apostle John is in the Island of Patmos, a prisoner of the faith. And there, on the Lord's Day, he gets a vision. He gets a revelation of Christ. He sees the risen Christ, and he tells us, "I fell at his feet as [one] dead" (Revelation 1:17). There's such a sense of the awesome glory of God. Our God is a consuming fire, and we are to worship him with reverence and godly fear. That's the way it's put in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 12, and verses 28 and 29. We need grace to worship God acceptably.

So we must remember that Communion is a solemn occasion; it's a holy ordinance. The purpose of it is to remember the Lord's death; to remember the awful suffering of Christ, that which he had to endure, in order that we might be saved. He had to go through hell, so that we might not suffer hell, but so that we might have heaven.

To remember, yes, and then the second thing is, to show it forth, to profess our faith in him, and to show that he is our bread and our drink. We depend upon him. We get our life from Christ. We feed upon him, and we are showing, when we take Communion, what his death means to us.

Now, next, what is the pattern then, for the Scottish Communion? Scottish Communion lasted from a Thursday till the following Monday. First of all, the Thursday was observed as a day of *Humiliation and Prayer*; a day of fasting, of humbling oneself before the Lord; focusing upon our sin, looking into our hearts, and seeing the pride, and the lust, and the hypocrisy, and the deceitfulness, and the idols; and confessing our sins, repenting before God. We have a duty to examine our hearts in the light of God's law, to see our own guilt, to see our unworthiness of coming to his Table, and to confess our sin, and to seek the blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sins; so, grieving over our sins, and rejoicing in Christ, rejoicing that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. So, it's dealing, in a sense, with justification by faith alone in Christ alone. So, Thursday is the day of focusing on our sin, of repentance, confession, and forgiveness.

And then Friday—Friday was the day for *Self-Examination*. Who should come to the Lord's Table? It's not for everyone. It's a table for the Lord's people, the Lord's people who are walking with him. It's a day for self-examination. Do we belong to the Lord's people, or do we not? Have we been converted? Or are we just hypocrites following the others? Do we have a living faith in the living Savior? Do we have the marks of grace? Are we growing in grace? Are we the people of God? Are we the Lord's people in truth? The Lord's Table is only for the Lord's people. So the Friday, then, was for self-examination and looking for the marks of grace.

The Saturday was very much *Preparation*, thinking about Christ's love, and seeking to warm our hearts, and to stir ourselves up by considering Christ's love for us. A day of prayer and preparation, yes, and thirsting—hungering and thirsting for Christ and for his presence.

And then comes the Sabbath, *the Sunday morning*. The Sunday morning service, the sermon that we call *The Action Sermon*, we concentrate on the *Atoning Work of Christ*, his sufferings, what

he did for us. It would focus upon his death, upon that finished work on Calvary, and upon the fact that Christ was made sin for us. He was made a curse for us, to redeem us from the curse of the law. So, focusing on the reconciliation, the propitiation, the atonement.

And then, following the sermon, it would be the *Fencing of the Table*. Fencing of the Table would state clearly who should come to the Table, and who should not. It's for the Lord's people, and for the Lord's people who are not backslidden and living in open sin. And so, the Lord's people would be set out in their characteristics.

Then, the Lord's people are invited to the Table, and they come forward. And there, there would be a *Pre-Communion Address*. And in that pre-communion address, the focus would be upon Christ and his love for us—the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

And then, having eaten the bread and drunk the wine, comes the *Post-Communion Address*, which would encourage us to live as Christians ought to live in the world. We have made this profession of our faith, now let us live consistent with that profession—a challenge to be real Christians, and seeking to benefit from the sacrament. Christ is our food and drink. We go on in the strength of Christ our Lord, rising from the Table to live for him, as bright and shining witnesses in the world.

Then, on the Sabbath evening, the *Gospel would be Preached Fully and Freely*. Sinners would be warned of the danger of ending up in hell; the wrath of God proclaimed; but also the call, the call to come to Christ; the cross of Christ proclaimed; and Christ freely offered to sinners; “Whosoever will, let him come! Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” So it would be a sermon calling upon sinners to repent and believe in Jesus, and to be saved.

Then on the Monday, would be the *Thanksgiving Service*, giving thanks to God for his mercy, for his goodness to us over the weekend, for all of the blessings that we enjoy from his hand, but especially for the blessings of the gospel, for Christ the Savior, his finished work, his resurrection, his ascension up to heaven, his sitting at the right hand of God the Father, his making continual intercession for us. And yes, there would be a focus also on the second coming of Christ, looking forward to his coming, “For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). So there's a looking, yes, a looking back at Calvary, but also a looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

So that would be then the pattern of the Communion weekend. So finally, what are the benefits from such a blessed sacramental weekend? Well, there's benefits in feeding on Christ by faith, of course. There's the benefit of enjoying his special communion, looking for his presence, and seeking to experience his presence; not just going through the ritual, not just being taught, but seeking to know that Christ is there, and to feel that he is there. It involves being edified, remembering Christ's death, and also showing forth Christ's death to those who look on, to the world around, showing forth that Christ has died, died for us, and risen again, and we live in the light of his death. It's an opportunity for us to profess our faith in him, and to tell the world, and to tell the church too, that we are Christians who follow Christ, and trust in him as our Savior. The Scottish Communion weekend is a particular preaching feast. There is food for our souls. These different ministers come, and they preach these sermons on Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday, Sunday, and Monday—all these sermons, there's a feast for our souls. And then there's opportunity for fellowship, for fellowship in the church, with extra prayer meetings held over the weekend too, and there's the opportunity for fellowship in our homes, and welcoming the Lord's people from other areas to come and stay with us, sharing together in meals, and talking together of our Savior and what he has done for us.

So this series of sermons which follows takes a pattern then at the Scottish Communion. May God bless these sermons to you, and may you be edified and built up in your faith. Amen.