

Maundy Thursday 2026

The Lessons of Lent – Forgetting to Remember

God grant us at all times, and especially during this sacred season of Lent, that we neither forget nor underestimate the completion of the forgiveness that our Savior Jesus earned for us on the Cross of Calvary. Amen.

Dear Fellow Recipients of the Messiah's love and forgiveness, one last time we search the Passion history to discover a lesson our God would have us learn. We find our final lesson this evening in the 11th Chapter of Paul's first recorded Letter to the Corinthians:

^{ESV} **(1 Corinthians 11:23-25) The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."**

This is God's Word. *Holy Spirit, open our minds to understand and our hearts to believe all that you here would teach us. So also we pray, "Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"* Amen.

Today is, of course, Maundy Thursday, the day Jesus instituted what we today know as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Stop here for a moment to consider that first Maundy Thursday. Surely it must have been a night of comradery there in the upper room, but also a night of great tension. There was comfort in the sharing of the Passover meal, but there was also foreboding. Jesus understood that the remainder of his earthly life could be measured in hours, and the manner of his imminent death terrible beyond human comprehension. Even with their limited understanding, Jesus' disciples must also have felt the tension. Though they obviously resisted the thought, Jesus had made it clear to them that he came to Jerusalem to die. He had also told them, just before instituting the Lord's Supper, that this would be his last meal with them before his death (Luke 22). Something dark and ominous was bearing down on Jesus and his men.

If we actually take the time to think about it, you and I will feel the tension even today. Though on this night we are given a bit of a respite as we celebrate the reception of an amazing gift from our Savior, Good Friday looms. How could it not?

When Jesus first instructed his disciples to **"do this in remembrance of me,"** think of how strange and ominous those words must have sounded. He was quite literally instructing them to remember that which had not yet even occurred. And then how immeasurably more mystified they must have been when he told them that the bread and the wine they were receiving were his very body and blood, "given and shed" as payment for the sins of the world. How confusing and disconcerting to receive the Savior's own body and blood from the hand of the *living, breathing* Savior himself. The disciples were soon to learn exactly what Jesus meant by **"given and shed."** Most, if not all, saw it with their own eyes the very next day.

Still, it is unlikely in the extreme that *all* confusion was erased by the death of Jesus. For example, what exactly were they supposed to "remember"? Did Jesus mean, *"Don't forget me"*? That would have seemed rather pointless, for how could they ever forget Jesus? Did he mean, *"Never forget what they did to me, or the injustice of it all"*? How unlike Jesus to effectively tell his followers to hold a grudge or to right the wrong. This was the same Savior who had told them to **"turn the other cheek"** and to leave vengeance to God himself.

What then did he mean by “**do this in remembrance of me.**” In other words, of what exactly did Jesus’ followers need to be reminded. To ask the question another way, what were they in danger of forgetting? What might they *forget to remember*?

The question is neither unimportant nor theoretical. Jesus’ instruction “**do this in remembrance of me**” was not intended only for those few men in the Upper Room on that first Maundy Thursday. Jesus instituted this Supper for all Christians, and his command therefore remains in effect as long as the earth remains. That means you and I are also included, and that you and I are in danger of *forgetting to remember*.

Jesus knows something about us. He knows that we are fully capable of forgetting even those things that matter most. God’s Word is full of examples. In fact the entire history of the Children of Israel is one long example of forgetting to remember. God visited ten miraculous plagues upon the people of Egypt. Abraham’s descendants saw them all, and yet apparently forgot as soon as they reached the Red Sea. He proved his trustworthy providence in the wilderness by miraculously supplying food and water. They forgot. They forgot all they saw and heard on Mt. Sinai within 40 days of Moses’ departure to go to meet with the God who had provided such obvious proof of both his existence and his power. They forgot the “old God” and created their own god in the form of a calf. God told them to destroy the pagan idols in the Promised Land. They forgot. He promised that he would send the Messiah. They forgot.

All of that history was recorded in the Bible and delivered *to us* so that *we* might remember and learn. Still we forget. We forget his faithfulness in past trials, his presence in current struggles, his promise never to forsake us in the future. Obviously then Jesus recognized a very real problem in us and therefore also the need to remind us to remember. Yet if we are to remember not to forget in connection with the Lord’s Supper, we must first understand exactly what it was that he told us to remember. Ask yourself, right now, if you know. You’ve heard the words hundreds, even thousands of times. What is Jesus telling you to remember?

Some imagine that this was something of an ancient version of the establishment of Memorial Day, when we are supposed to remember those who fought our nation’s battles, or Lincoln’s birthday, when we are supposed to remember one of our greatest presidents. They think of the Lord’s Supper therefore as a memorial dinner – something we’re supposed to do occasionally so that we don’t forget Jesus – as though he were some insecure teenager pathetically asking that first love to “*never forget me.*” What an insult to the Savior of mankind.

If not that, then what? To even begin to understand we must first recognize that never in his life was Jesus either selfish or self-centered. Everything he did, for the entire 33 years of his earthly life, was directed to the good of man. Never was he self-serving. In his own words, “**The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”^{ESV} (Mark 10:45) When he therefore pointed to himself and said “**do this in remembrance of me**” it was not for his own benefit but for ours. It is to our benefit to remember Jesus, not his.

So far so good, but where do we go from there? How are *we* to benefit from remembering *Jesus*? We are to remember what he did for us. Not just the man but the mission. It is in that sense that the saying is true: “*Maundy Thursday needs Good Friday.*” In fact Maundy Thursday makes no sense at all apart from Good Friday, and Good Friday is a mystery explained only by Easter Sunday.

On Thursday, the living Jesus said “*this is my body, given into death, and this is my shed blood*” and then “*remember me.*” None of that made any sense until he was crucified on Good Friday, and Good Friday was only recognized as the victory that it was by Jesus’ resurrection on Easter Sunday. So what it is, exactly, that Jesus was reminding us, in advance, never to forget?

“It is finished!” That is what we are to remember every single time we approach the Lord’s Table. Jesus was telling us to remember his history-altering statement from the cross, ***“It is finished!”*** – the statement that was irrefutably confirmed by God the Father when he raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. It is Jesus’ declaration: *“All is done, and I did all.”*

We need that reminder, even today, don’t we. We need that divine, indelible arrow that points always to the cross and to the completion of the payment for sin that Jesus there provided. We need it because of our weakness, not because of our strength. Maundy Thursday is all about Jesus accommodating our weakness. Though he himself was supplying the full and complete payment for all sin, he knew we would forget; knew that we would wander from this truth. He knew that mankind would naturally adopt one of two lies. Either we would come to believe that we have no sin and therefore no need for forgiveness, or we would assume that we ourselves could (and must) provide our own payment. The cross serves as a constant reminder that both are false. The fact that the very Son of God suffered as he did is proof both of the existence of sin and of its terrible consequences. Jesus’ proclamation that ***“It is finished!”*** serves as God’s eternal reminder that the payment is full and complete. Nothing needs to be added by man. Nothing *can* be added by man. There is no need to pay a debt that has already been paid. That’s what Jesus was telling us when he said, ***“this do in remembrance of me.”*** *“Understand and remember what I am about to do for you. I am about to pay for every single one of your sins. Every time you receive my body and blood, remember that you are forgiven – not because you are worthy or deserving but because of what I have done for you, because of the payment I have provided.”*

Not just Maundy Thursday but the entirety of the Christian faith is about what our God has done for us, not about what we must do for God. Marvel at the grace of your God. He didn’t need to add Holy Communion to the gifts he had given us. It was enough that he paid the debt of sin that we could not. Enough that he himself creates faith in our hearts to believe what he has told us. Enough that he sustains and preserves saving faith in our hearts. That would have been enough, but he gives us even more. Knowing us as he does – our weakness and our forgetfulness – he bends down from heaven to accommodate us in our weakness. Knowing that we crave material, tangible evidence, he reaffirms his love for us by giving such tangible evidence: his very body and blood. Knowing that we might exclude ourselves from the pronouncement to the masses, he comes to us individually in his Supper. To the individual alone he speaks, he reminds, he reaffirms: *“You, you personally, you who are here receiving my very body and blood, you are forgiven.”*

This is what God’s children are to remember every time we commune. Our sins do not accumulate as we walk through life, only to be removed periodically or occasionally. Forgiveness is our constant possession every single moment that faith resides in our hearts. It is through faith alone that we are saved. Faith connects us to Jesus, and forgiveness is ours every moment we are thus connected to our Savior. The Lord’s Supper is Jesus’ personal, individual reminder not of any lingering debt of sin but of the forgiveness that remains our constant, unending, uninterrupted possession through faith alone in what our Savior paid with his body and blood. This is what we are to remember – the very heart or core of the Christian religion: through faith alone in Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. God remembers them no more. Remember therefore not your sins when you come to the Lord’s Table; remember your Savior, who has already paid for them, already erased them. Amen.