

The Lord's Supper

"Dead Like Me"

First Corinthians 11:26

A Missing Man formation is incredibly emotional. It's an aerial salute performed as part of a flyby of aircraft at a funeral or memorial event, typically in memory of a fallen pilot, a well-known military service member or veteran, or a well-known political figure.

I've been to a number of Law Enforcement funerals. Too many. They usually feature a heart wrenching End of Watch ceremony. Dispatch calls to the deceased officer over the radio, as if to contact him. After two calls, Dispatch acknowledges that the officer is not responding. Dispatch then announces that the officer has ended his watch.

I got to thinking about those public displays because of the apostle Paul's emphasis on the public display of "death" when describing the Lord's Supper:

1Co 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.**

It's more obvious that "death" is prominent in the original word order of the Greek: "The death of the Lord you proclaim until He comes" is the more literal translation.

Jesus also emphasized His death when He first gave us these symbols. He spoke of the bread as His body, to be given for us; and of the wine as His blood, to be shed for us.

Without being irreverent, the Lord's Supper is both a Missing Man formation and an End of Watch declaration.

Jesus was born to die. His mission was to go to the Cross. It wasn't an afterthought, or a mistake. It was necessary in order for mankind to be reconciled to God. On the Cross, as the lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, Jesus Himself said, "It is finished!" End of Watch.

Jesus let us know that after He died, He would be a missing man:

Joh 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

Joh 14:2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

Joh 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

Joh 14:4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."

The huge difference, of course, is that Jesus is returning:

1. First He's coming to resurrect and rapture the church He is missing from.
2. Second He's returning to establish a new "watch," the Kingdom of God on the earth.

That, too, is anticipated in the way Paul describes the Lord's Supper, when he added "till He comes."

The Lord's Supper, at least in part, is a public proclamation of the Lord's death and of His two returns.

We may use it as a time of introspection and prayer; nothing wrong with that. But it is also a very public proclamation.

This word, "proclaim," as it's used here, can mean that a proclamation should accompany the Lord's Supper. In other words, there should always be a teaching, or some instruction, when communion is served.

More likely Paul had in mind the other way that this word "proclaim" can be used. It can mean that the Supper itself proclaims things, in its symbolism.

It is, in fact, meant to communicate without words the death and the returns of Jesus; and therefore how we ought to live in-between.

Think of it this way. Let's say a nonbeliever having no previous church experience came to church for the first time ever. At that service, they were exposed to Jesus' simple explanation of the elements, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me," and, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

Wouldn't the nonbeliever understand the ceremony as proclaiming the Lord's death?

An astute observer might grasp that in taking the elements, you were also identifying with Jesus in His death. You were, in fact, dying with Him.

But in dying with Him, you remain alive, to serve Him, until His return for you.

The nonbeliever might see in symbol what Paul states so clearly in Galatians 2:20,

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

It should come as no surprise that Paul emphasized the Lord's death at the Lord's Supper. He emphasized it the entire time he was in Corinth. He told the Corinthians,

1Co 2:2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him **crucified**.

Paul taught a lot more than the crucifixion. In chapter fifteen, for example, he presents the Gospel, and gives a masterful apologetic for the resurrection. He describes the rapture, too.

His main emphasis, however, in Corinth, his theme, was the death of Jesus, and applying it to the believers.

Applying this "Christ and Him crucified" theme to communion, "the death of the Lord" reminds us we are crucified with Him.

It reminds us we are to daily bear the Cross. It is a strong picture of dying to self.

Paul said we are to “always [carry] about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (Second Corinthians 4:10).

William MacDonald commented on this, saying, “The life of the servant of God is one of constant dying.”

This is immensely practical. Any of the difficult situations occurring in Corinth could have been resolved by living as though crucified.

For example, the believers were suing one another in open court:

- A crucified man doesn't answer wrongs against him with litigation. Being dead to self means I can forsake my rights when I'm wronged in order to not bring reproach upon the name of Jesus.
- A crucified man doesn't wrong others. He doesn't treat them in ways that would incite them to want to take him to court. Instead he thinks more highly of them than he does of himself.

Do you recall the problem in Corinth at communion? The believers came together every Sunday night for a service in which they celebrated the Lord's Supper. Prior to it, the believers shared a pot-luck, called the Love Feast. At the pre-communion meal, the wealthy were hoarding food and drink, not sharing it with the disadvantaged members of the body.

If the believers in Corinth had been emphasizing the Lord's death, and dying to self, there would have been no problems with the wealthy among them hoarding food at the Love Feast. They would have been practicing crucifixion by sharing rather than hoarding.

It involves more than just how Christians behave at pot-lucks. It gets us back to basics. Back to Jesus' own emphasis on the Cross - that we pick it up daily, until He returns for us.

And that is exactly what Paul said: "you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

You live a crucified, dead-to-self life, until the Lord comes for you individually in death; or for us corporately in the rapture.

"Till He comes" focuses our attention on the imminence of Jesus' return for us. It is our motivation to daily die to self serving Him.

Could Jesus really return at any moment? James thought so when he wrote, "Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, **for the coming of the Lord is at hand**. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. **Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!** (James 5:7–9).

When the apostle Paul described the Lord's coming for the church, he used personal pronouns that show he was convinced he himself might be among those who would be caught up alive to meet the Lord:

"We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord . . . **we** who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (First Thessalonians 4:15, 17).

Another (biblical) proof for the imminence of the rapture is what Paul called “the fullness of the Gentiles.”

Rom 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until **the fullness of the Gentiles** has come in.

At the end of the Book of Acts, Paul declared, “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (28:28). Since then, the Gospel has gone out, and though Jews also are saved, mostly Gentiles are getting saved.

We know God is not done dealing with Jews as a nation. He will do that again in the seven-year Great Tribulation. Prior to that, Jesus will remove His church.

The fullness of the Gentiles refers to the full number of people who will be saved that constitute the church. Once the last person of the church age is saved, we will be raptured.

It’s therefore not a date we can discover; it can happen at any time.

Some would argue that the fullness of the Gentiles obviously could not have occurred in the first century, or any time long ago; therefore it says nothing about imminence.

I say that is an argument from hindsight. I agree - I don't see how the fullness of the Gentiles could have occurred in the distant past. But that doesn't mean it couldn't have. It doesn't mean God didn't have a way of fulfilling it.

Knowing the Lord could return at any moment encourages me to the kind of die-to-self behavior worthy of a disciple of Jesus Christ. I want to be occupying when He comes, busy with His work, doing His will.