

On the First Day of the Week

(Acts 20:7-12)

I. Introduction

- A. Like the old TV show *Dragnet*, the story is true and names have been changed
1. “Jack” grew up in a legalistic church with an legalistic, dominating father
 - a. There was no arguing-- father’s way and church were the only way
 - b. It wasn’t just that truth was narrow; it was hopelessly, oppressively narrow
 2. This (naturally) caused Jack to rebel; he joined a large community church
 - a. **Totally Different:** Large, interdenominational, full band, Saturday night
 - b. It was positive, uplifting, encouraging, affirming, spiritual... *different*
 - c. There was a focus on Jesus without the legalistic wrangling of his youth
 3. But Jack came to Denbigh. *Why leave new church where he grew so much?*
 - a. It wasn’t the doctrinal differences (*baptism, end-time, Calvinism, Spirit*)
 - b. It wasn’t the worship (*liked the instrumental praise, preferred our preaching*)
 - c. What Jack missed (*was surprised he missed*) was every-week communion
 - 1) He felt somehow disenfranchised without this weekly focus on cross
 - 2) Without Supper, church never felt like church (*more like Wed night*)
- B. People notice 2 things when they first visit us first time—music & communion
1. I agree with Jack, the latter is more significant difference than the former
 - a. Yes, there are reasons for a cappella singing; I’m happy where we are
 - b. But communion is tied by its very nature to the cross and thus to gospel
 2. I think our practice of eating Lord’s Supper each week is important
 - a. Many traditions observe it much less frequently (*quarterly or monthly*)
 - b. My point isn’t for us examine those practices, but to re-examine our own
 - c. Some suggest frequent communion makes it less special and meaningful
 - 1) It’s hard to argue with that; most of us at times slip into auto-pilot
 - 2) But having supper/dinner every day is monotonous, but we still do it!
 - d. I think there are sound Bible reasons to have communion each Sunday
 3. The proof text we often use was also Tuesday’s Bible reading— **Acts 20:7**
 4. Let’s take a look at this text and then our practice of weekly communion

II. On the First Day of the Week: The Text

- A. In [Acts 20](#), Paul and Silas are on the return part of Paul's 3rd missionary trip
1. They have left Ephesus and travelled through Macedonia (likely Philippi)
 - a. Paul went to Greece 3 months where he had both success and opposition
 - b. He and his entourage (including Luke, the "we" section) come to Troas
 - 1) It was at Troas Paul received the "*Macedonia call*" to Europe ([16:8](#))
 - 2) Paul says at Troas there was open door for his ministry ([2 Cor 2:12](#))
 - c. Paul is heading back to Jerusalem for what he believes to be the last time
 - d. He next meets the Ephesian elders in his tearful goodbye ([Acts 20:13-38](#))
 2. In our text, Paul spends a week with the church in Troas ([Acts 20:6-7](#))
 - a. Paul stays a week in Troas; he leaves the day after meeting with church
 - 1) They met in order to "*break bread*," which sounds like communion
 - 2) Communion was on Sunday; Paul waits a week so as to participate
 - b. Traditionally, we have seen this as the pattern for weekly communion
 - 1) The church met on the first day of the week in order to break bread
 - 2) Paul knew they regularly did that, so he stayed around to commune
 - c. Every week has a first day, so we should eat communion each Sunday
- B. But is [Acts 20:7](#) an iron-clad pattern for the church today? Maybe not.
1. Text is in middle of a travelogue where Paul was in Troas for one Sunday
 - a. Did they "break bread" each Sunday? Because Paul was there that day?
 - b. Actually, we can't be sure precisely what "*breaking bread*" means here
 - 1) Sometimes this phrase does seem to denote communion ([Acts 2:42](#))
 - 2) But it is also an expression for sharing a common meal ([Acts 2:46](#))
 2. So in [Acts 20:7](#), the church met on a first day of the week to "*break bread*"
 - a. Did they not "*break bread*" until after midnight Monday morning? ([v. 11](#))
 - b. Did they "*break bread*" Monday morning? Is Luke on Jewish time here?
 - 1) Was this breaking bread communion or a common fellowship meal?
 - 2) Every week? Did Paul hit right week? Or have it because of Paul?
 - c. This **could** be a lot of things; what it doesn't seem to be is a pattern!
 3. At least, we don't see it as a pattern for how LONG sermons should be!

- C. But John Mark Hicks, in *Come to the Table*, does see a pattern here of sorts
1. He suggests that **Acts 20** reflects an earlier pattern in Emmaus Rd (**Lk 24**)
 - a. He see Emmaus Road story as the church's first communion service
 - 1) This special communion with Jesus was on first day of week (**24:13**)
 - 2) In this meal, Jesus broke bread with these two disciples (**24:30**)
 - 3) They ate together with Jesus (**24:42**) and were taught by him (**24:44**)
 - 4) There was specific focus on message of the resurrection (**24:46**)
 - b. John Mark sees Emmaus Road as a communal pattern reflected in **Acts 20**
 - 1) The disciples in Acts 20 met on the first day of the week (**20:7**)
 - 2) They came together specifically to “*break bread*” (**20:7**)
 - 3) They ate together (**20:11**) and they were taught by Paul (**20:7**)
 - 4) And there was also this object lesson on the resurrection (**20:12**)
 2. Is Luke is repeating his pattern in **Acts 20** or are the similarities accidental
 - a. John Mark sees “*first day of the week*” connecting **Acts 20** and **Luke 24**
This is no mere temporal marker or incidental reference. Rather, seen in the light of Luke 24, it is a theological marker. There is a theological significance to the “first day of the week” as the day of resurrection and the birthday of the church.
 - b. Point isn't “*communion every Sunday*” keeping an ancient pattern or form
 - 1) The problem with a pattern is that you can follow it mindlessly
 - 2) That is a struggle for us as we eat each week and it not be “ordinary”
 - c. But isn't part of the point of communion a regular REMINDER of cross?
- D. Ultimately, the reason we commune every Sunday is not because of a pattern
1. No, it is rather because of a cross, the cross that is at the center of our faith
 - a. Jesus died on the cross for us; he calls us to cross to die for one another.
 - b. The church is community shaped BY the cross and shaped LIKE a cross.
 - c. The cross is who we are and the cross is who we are called to become
 2. Leonard Allen (*Cruciform Church*) says emphasis on cross does 3 things
 - a. It reveals to us most clearly the heart and love of God (**Rom 5:8**)
 - b. It also reveals to us the horror of sin and the depths of God's grace
 - c. It points us to model for God's new social order, the church (**1 Jn 3:16**)
 3. Communion points us back to all three of these as special; focus on cross

- E. We don't stress communion because we have some previous hidden pattern
 - 1. We stress communion because we are a people of the cross
 - a. If we are going to stress the cross in our assembly and worship...
 - b. If we are going to be together and corporately a people of cross...
 - c. If we are going to remind ourselves of our commitment to cross...
 - d. Then what better way to do it than in the way Jesus himself taught us?
 - 2. Emphasis on communion isn't because of a pattern... *it's more important*
 - 3. Today we again come back to the table of the Lord and the cross of Christ
 - a. It's what we do each week— the bread and cup, the body and blood
 - 1) We don't participate in this memorial meal because we are right
 - 2) We do it because we aren't right and can't be right apart from cross
 - b. This participation of the cross reminds us of how broken we are w/o grace
 - c. Let the words of Stuart Townend remind you of how deep is Father's love
*How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure
 That He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure...*

III. Invitation

- A. Our text ends with tragedy-comedy of Eutychus' out a window ([Acts 20:9-12](#))
 - 1. Sleeping in church is serious; more serious to sleep in a upstairs window!
 - a. As Paul talks on and on, Eutychus tries harder to stay awake
 - b. He falls out of the window, dies, and is raised back to life
 - 2. Then they go back to church to “*break bread.*” *Typical communion service*
- B. It is the typical—Lord's Supper always points us to resurrect life in Christ
 - 1. The bread of heaven came down to give us this life ([John 6:33, 35, 40](#))
 - a. The bread and cup remind us of the body and blood of the death of Jesus
 - b. But they also remind us of the new life we have in Jesus ([John 6:53-54](#))
 - 2. Eutychus is not the only person to be raised to life in communion service
 - a. We all are. Communion reconnects us to Christ-event that gives life
 - b. At the table we reaffirmed our commitment to live the life of the cross
 - c. In communion, we examine ourselves—we recommit our lives to Him
- C. So the Lord's Supper also becomes weekly invitation to “*Kneel at the Cross*”