

## **Decisions, Decisions (January 3, 2016)**



Every single day of our lives we make decisions. From the mundane – what socks will I wear today? – to the crucial – should I marry, who should I marry?

Some decisions are fairly easy to make – others can be truly difficult.

So, how do you make these decisions?

The beginning of a new year is often the time we pause and take stock of our lives.

What am I going to do with this year – this precious 1/80<sup>th</sup> of my earthly life?

What am I going to do with my money, my career, my family?

Should I go to Vanuatu as a missionary or get a different job?

Should I buy the Volvo or give more to help the poor?

How should I spend my time?

This morning I want to give you a few practical tools to help you to make godly, wise decisions.

Before we look at these tools I want to start you thinking biblically. I will begin by asking you a question:



Do you believe there is just one best path for us to live our life in the will of God?

By this I mean every time we are faced with a decision – is there from God's view a best, better and worst decision we can make?

Is there a path He really wants us to take?

You are twenty-five years old. You are contemplating marriage and three choices keep coming to mind and they are driving you crazy.

One option is staying single to serve God wholeheartedly – but you want to get married but lust might be a problem.

Or you could marry Becky – great girl – a Christian – but ministry is something you are contemplating and Becky doesn't want to be a pastor's wife.

Or wait for a girl as sold out for ministry as you.

What do you do?

Is one of these:

# THE WILL OF GOD



**The** will of God – for your life.

Is another path outside the will of God – or could one, two or even all three be acceptable decisions before the Lord?

I want to suggest that Scripture *never* presents us as being on some great hunt to find **the** one path for us to live.

The godly men of the Bible are seen weighing up decisions – going down what they believe is the best path – but knowing that one of a number of paths is acceptable to God.

For example – in Genesis 24 – Abraham sends his servant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac. Listen to what he said. Genesis 24:6–8:

Abraham said to him, “[Go back to] my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, ... and you shall take a wife for my son from there. But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.”

I believe God wants you to find a wife for Isaac from the God-worshippers in my homeland – not the pagans here.

**But**, if there is no godly woman who agrees to marry Isaac – OK – you are free from your obligation to find a wife for my boy.

There was not just one woman who had to marry Isaac at all costs.

There is not **one** will for your life. God has not decreed that you have to wear the black pants rather than the blue. Be a lawyer not an accountant. Marry Susan rather than Jenny. Have three kids not four.

Having said this – at times the principles God gives us indicates there really is only one choice we should make in some circumstances.

Should I steal from my employer or not? No you should not! – God's Word has given us the command – do not steal. You can choose to violate it – but you are then clearly outside the will of God.

At other times it is not as easy. Susan and Jenny – both great girls who love the Lord – but is one **the** best decision for you as a Christian.

God's Word *does* give us principles to help us here. If both are equally godly, if godly counsellors say both are great girls, you pray and both seem great – then just choose who you want to live with – and once you marry her – then she **is** the will of God for you.

So what help do we as Christians have to help us in making the big decisions?

Basically, there are **three** main aids God has given us to make wise, godly decisions.

They are:



- **Revelation**
- **Counsel**
- **Prayer**

With this in mind, here is the point I want to make this morning.





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What do I mean by this?

With each of these tools – there is a godly version and a worldly version of these tools – and often the worldly version masquerades as being godly.

If you look at these three tools – Revelation, counsel and prayer – you might think they are pretty straightforward – and in a sense – they are.

However, we have within us a sin nature that fights against the counsel of God and looks for a way to make the decision it wants above what God may want.

While I shouldn't be surprised – truth is – I am constantly surprised at just how some Christians make the big decisions of their lives.

I can think of at least four families in the last ten years who came to me unannounced to tell me that they had sold their house and bought a new one – two to three hours away – so just wondering – did I know a decent church around there?

No I didn't – and had they thought through the consequences?

Yeah – a sea change or tree change is nice – but what does this mean for church, accountability, fellowship?

I then asked – what biblical principles went into their decision? – none – they just wanted to do it.

What godly counsel had they sought? – not really any – they did run it past their mum – but it was their choice.

How much prayer had gone into this? – A few token prayers – what's my issue?

I can tell you none of those families are doing at all well spiritually now. Most have totally rejected the faith. Don't get me wrong – the move away was not the only factor – but it certainly didn't help.

The decisions were not thought through biblically – and they paid a high price.

First, let's consider the tool of **Revelation**.

At times God has given His people clear, specific instructions. Abraham – leave Ur and go to Canaan. Paul – go across to Macedonia. Moses – go and tell Pharaoh – let My people go.

That is incredibly rare.

Today – what God has given us are clear Scriptural principles by which to make biblical decisions.

I didn't just call this tool **the Word of God** – because many still want to add other forms of revelation to our arsenal.

But I want to suggest these other revelations are not normative for today. The revelation that is given for you and I to make decisions – is the Word of God – not dreams, prophecies, gut feelings, fleeces.

What we have in the Bible are principles – not specifics.

If you are offered a job in Mackay – you can't open the Bible and find a passage that says:

David Moore – you should not take the job in Mackay – thus says the Lord.

Instead, what we have are principles to guide us in decision making.

However, we also need to be aware that there are no shortage of false prophets out there saying they speak for God. They want to tell you what to do.

They will make decisions for you – guide you through dreams or feelings or some other spiritual deceit.

A number of years ago I met a couple who were in all sorts of strife in their relationship. It only took a few minutes to realise they were so different, so mismatched.

I asked them how they ended up marrying?

They said they were at a church where one of the men there who said he was a prophet approached them with a revelation that since they were both divorced with children – God wanted them to marry.

Who were they to fight the will of God? – so they married – and regretted it every day since.

Matthew 7:15:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Revelation 13 speaks of a second beast – the false prophets who claim to speak for God yet lead men and women astray.

It is not at all normative for God to speak directly today.

Don't make decisions based on burning bosoms or fleeces or voices from heaven or prophecies.

If anyone claims to speak for God – do what John tells us in 1 John 4:1:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

See if what they say lines up with the principles God has given us in His Word. If not – shake the dust from your feet and move on.

The truth is that we already have the all wisdom of God made available to us.

2 Timothy 3:16–17:

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**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.**



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**Every** good work – not some good works – **every** good work.

1 Corinthians 1:16 tells us that we have the mind of Christ.

The Word can guide us and direct us in every situation we face.

The Bible is sufficient for all our needs in life.

Another Word of warning – don't Scripture twist. Don't look for a text to reinforce your poor decision.

Read the Word wisely and in context.

I have heard some real doozies.

I wanted to know if I should take the job – so I opened my Bible at random and this verse Genesis 2:15 jumped out at me:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

God wants me to take the job.

Don't do this. God gives us principles.

One of the main tasks of Scripture is to guide. To give us light and direction in making the decisions of life.

Psalms 119 is a Psalm about the Word and guidance.

Psalms 119:105:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

That is why we have to read and memorise and know and treasure the Word.

The more the Word is in you – the better decisions you make.

You go to make a poor decision – an ungodly decision – and verses about purity or money or kindness or love just pop into your head and guide you. You know what the right choice is.

Psalms 19:7–11:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter

also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Love His Word and keep His Word – and there is reward. The commands of God are **not** given to restrict us but for our good.

Blackaby and King put it this way:

Suppose the Lord says, “I have a gift for you—a beautiful, wonderful expression of what love is. I will provide you with a spouse – a husband or wife. Your relationship with this person will bring out the very best in you. It will give you an opportunity to experience some of the deepest and most meaningful expressions of human love. That individual will release in you some wonderful things, affirm some things in you, and be there to strengthen you when you lose heart. Within that relationship, your mate will love you, believe in you and trust you. Out of that relationship I will bless the two of you with children and those children will sit on your knee and say, “Daddy (or Mummy), I love you.”

But, then He says, “You shall not commit adultery” (Matt. 5:27). Is that command to limit or restrict you? No! It is to protect and free you to experience love at its human best. What happens if you break the command and commit adultery? The love relationship is ruptured between husband and wife. Trust is gone. Hurt sets in. Guilt and bitterness creep in. Even the children begin to respond differently. Scars may severely limit the future dimensions of love you could have experienced together.

God’s commands are designed to guide you to life’s very best. ... God has given His commands so you may prosper and live life to its fullest measure. If you love Him, you will obey Him! If you do not obey Him, you do not really love Him (see John 14:24). God is love. Because of His love, His will for you is always best. God is all-knowing, so His directions are always right.<sup>1</sup>

The Lord loves us and gives us wise counsel and guidance.

So how does this flesh out practically?

When I am asked for advice, many times what people want are black and white answers when the questions are grey.

Don’t get me wrong, there are some questions with pretty black and white answers.

Can you commit adultery or abuse your child? – No!

But most of the moral questions you and I deal with day to day are not always as black and white as we might want.

Should I let my 12 year old watch the new *Star Wars* movie with his mates?

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Blackaby and Claude King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 14.

Should I let my 17 year old daughter get a rose tattooed on her ankle?

Should I buy the new Holden HSV I have my heart set on?

What age should I let my kids have Facebook?

These are the type of real world questions you and I confront on a regular basis.

As much as Christians would love to have black and white answers to them – they don't always have simple yes/no or one size fits all answers.

What is right for one may not be right for another.

But God has not left us without wisdom for navigating a wise path through the questions of life.

What the Lord has done is this. He has given us some moral absolutes. Don't murder, don't steal from your boss, don't commit fornication and the like.

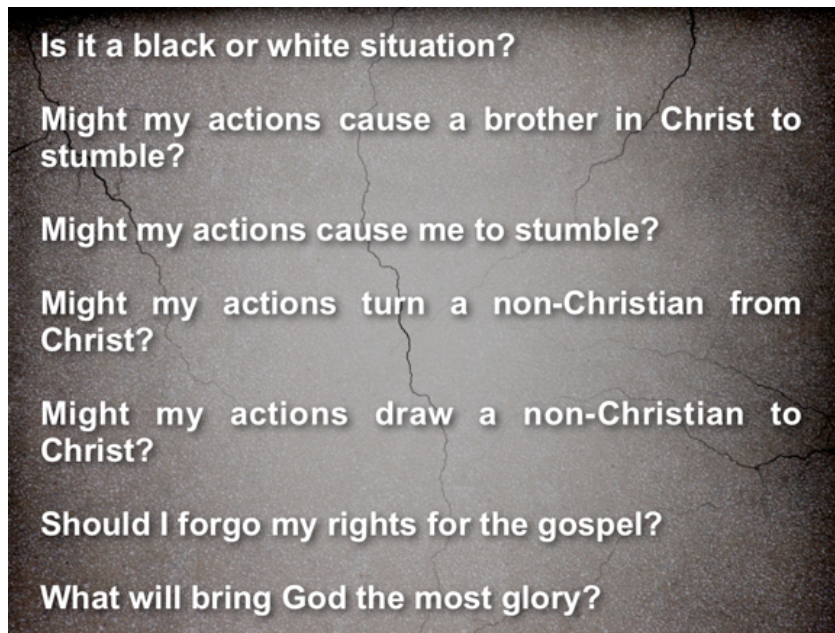
But then to help us with the decisions that are not as absolute – He has given us a number principles to help guide us through the decisions we face in life.

But even then – some decisions are still incredibly difficult.

Sometimes it requires a weighting of two opposing principles – like the midwives who lied to Pharaoh to save lives – or Peter and John choosing not obey God rather than the Sanhedrin.

Sometimes the answer to the question depends on all the circumstances around that question.

Here is a grid you can run your decision through.



**Is it a black or white situation?**

Am I tempted to do something God has forbidden – adultery, theft, murder? Then we stop there – the answer is no.

**Might my actions cause a brother in Christ to stumble?**

There are things we are within our rights to do – have a beer – watch a movie – that other Christians might stumble over. They might have struggled with alcohol or lust. Don't do something that might impede them.

**Might my actions cause me to stumble?**

Don't go really close to the moral line. How often we step over the line. How often we draw the line in the wrong place.

**Might my actions turn a non-Christian from Christ?**

The world is watching – what do they see? Will it push them from Christ?

**Might my actions draw a non-Christian to Christ?**

Am I salt and light to the world?

**Should I forgo my rights for the gospel?**

Just because it is acceptable does not make it right. Our great task in life is to see others bend the knee and worship Jesus the King. Do what magnifies Him. Don't do what diminishes Him.

And while I put this last – I actually think this is the key principle.



## What will bring God the most glory?

I suspect that if we applied just this one principle to 99.9% of our decisions – the answer would be pretty clear.

Does it magnify God? Does it make God seem the most important thing in my life? Will it declare the holiness and majesty of God? Does it show I am living for eternity and not for this world?

Run your decision through this grid and there will not be too many times that the answer is not fairly clear.

Oftentimes a number of decisions would be acceptable – but usually one *clearly* glorifies God more.

I see it in guys struggling with who to marry.

Girl A – a Christian – not that committed – but stunning.

Girl B – a Christian – loves the Lord – but not as stunning.

I see it in how we spend our money.

You earned it – you can spend it any way you want.

Option A – I have \$100,000. I can buy a \$98,000 Audi and buy the wife some kitchen utensils.

Option B – I have \$100,000. I can buy a \$35,000 Commodore. I can buy the wife the couch she wants. I can give \$40,000 to missions. I can give the rest to the church and bless some brothers in need.

Do I watch this movie or not?

Do I spend my leisure time in this way or not?

Regardless of the decision – use these principles and in particular ask **what will bring God the most glory?**

If it helps ask **WWJD?** What Would Jesus Do? Make decisions the way Jesus made them.

Be imitators of Christ and in this way bring glory to God – the only One who deserves it.

Making godly decisions can be difficult – but these principles will help us make decisions in integrity – decisions which will enhance the glory of God.

A second help for decision making is **counsel**.

Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.

Wise, godly men and women in whom the word of Christ dwells – are a gift to the church to help us take the principles of the word and make decisions that will honour the Lord.

Sometimes you may not know the biblical principles, sometimes you may want advice to see if you are on the right track or your sin is stopping you doing what you know is right.

Ephesians 4:11–14:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

God gave you shepherds and leaders to help you become mature – to help you stop being tossed by every wave of deceit and temptation.

Go to wise men and women – godly men and women – gifts to the church to help you make these decisions.

There are men in my life I go to – and when I share my problem – they ask me a few questions – they suggest a few verses – and the clouds clear up – the decision seems obvious. They are a gift.

Let me say something here.

Don't shop for the wise man or woman who will give you the advice you want.

What do I mean?

We all have our weaknesses and blind spots.

Sometimes we look for someone with a blind spot in the area we are making our decision. We know what advice they will give – and we want to be able to say – but I spoke to Elder George and he agrees with me.

I have watched people who want to separate from their husband go and seek advice from someone who left their husband.

I have watched someone who fell for a non-Christian – seek out someone who also did a spot of missionary dating.

Careful – the advice you get might be what you want to hear, but it probably won't be unbiased.

Proverbs 11:14 tells us:

Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Go to a few wise men and women and you will be less likely to find someone with a blind spot.

Their counsel may pierce you – but those are faithful wounds.

A little advice here. Pick godly men and women to share with. Pick an ungodly person and not only will you get ungodly advice – but there is a chance your struggles will be shared in a prayer meeting or homegroup or just over coffee – for all the church to hear.

Pick a godly confidant.

Remember that there are also ear ticklers out there enticing you to follow them.

Psalms 1:1–2:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Unfortunately, some do choose the counsel of the wicked.

2 Timothy 4:3–4:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Today – everyone gets to give their opinion.

Dr Phil and Oprah and Ellen.

But also there is a forum or Facebook page where everyone can give you their advice.

Many claim to be Christian – most don't.

So much of the counsel given today is so worldly, unwise and dangerous it astounds me.

You can find someone saying just about anything and they can twist a bible verse to back them up.

And some Christians love it because it allows them to make choices their sinful heart wants.

I have heard it all. When someone is starting the glide into sin and we have approached them – I would love a dollar for the many times I have heard this:

You know thanks for coming but I really want to follow just one voice. My doctor, my psychologist, my naturopath, my boss' girlfriend is giving me counsel – and I just want to follow them.

Translation:

I have found someone who is enabling my sin and I don't want holiness interrupting my pleasure so please just go away. Let me wallow in my sin – while having my ear's tickled that it is justified.

We have been threatened with lawsuits, harassment and even violence to stop us trying to give wise counsel.

My advice is this.

Decide who your accountability, your counsel, your wise men and women will be now – and when you are struggling – go to them and heed them. They are God's gift to you.

Don't go to the person who will tell you what you want to hear. Go to the one who will tell you what you need to hear.

Test everything by the Word of God.

A third help for decision making is **prayer**.

We all know there is a link between prayer and wise guidance.

Colossians 1:9:

We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His *will* in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

James 1:5:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

However, I think many Christians fail to understand how prayer works in regard to guidance.

Listen to these two prayers.

Dear God,

You know I have feelings for Becky that have grown strong. However, she doesn't seem sold out as a Christian and doesn't want to be a missionary.

Because of this, I believe I should not marry her.

Please give me the strength to do your will.

And this one:

Dear God,

You know I have feelings for Becky that have grown strong. However, she doesn't seem sold out as a Christian and doesn't want to be a missionary.

But, I am not sure if you are saying I should not marry her.

If you don't want me to marry her – send someone in the next week to tell me not to marry her. Send me a verse that clearly relates to me not marrying Becky.

Otherwise I will assume it is OK to marry her.

You may laugh – but it is stunning how many Christians pray seeking permission for something they suspect is wrong – or pray asking for forgiveness because they are going to do what they know is wrong.

God – stop me – and if you don't it is Your fault.

Another couple I sat with – marriage a mess. I asked – why did you marry?

Well we blame God. We asked him to send us a sign if He didn't want us to marry.

Mind you – I asked them more questions – their parents, their pastor, their friends all said – don't marry! But they didn't see any of that as a sign from God.

I am not sure what they wanted.

In fact after the first service someone in the church came up to me and said:

I have a confession to make.

I made a very major life decision and after your sermon I think I made it on the wrong basis.

Here is how I made that decision. I prayed and said God – I am going to toss this coin. If it comes up heads five times in a row – I will take it as your will.

I got five heads and went down that path.

In fact it was a poor decision and didn't work out well. Today helped me understand it wasn't God's fault.

Don't put out fleeces or ask for signs – that is not how God guides.

So where does prayer fit in?

If you want to know how prayer works – look to Jesus.

Matthew 6:10:

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Pray that we would do His will – not ours. Seek to do His will not ours.

Luke 22:42:

[Jesus knelt down and prayed] saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Humanly speaking Jesus didn't want to go through the pain of the cross.

If the Father was willing – take that burden from Him.

However, if that is what must be – give Him the strength to do the will of God.

Ask God to suppress the sin in your heart and help you see clearly.

Ask God for wise counsel.

Ask God for the strength to do what is right even when you are struggling.

Ask God to use you to His glory.

These are the prayers He delights to answer.

Prayer is a gift from God to help us as we consider the principles of His Word and the wisdom from His servants.

Every one of us has a brand New Year stretching out before us.

This year we will all face many decisions, temptations, choices.

The Elders have a planning day for the year in a couple of weeks – please – pray for us.

My prayer – for myself – and for you – is that we would all make wise decisions that bring glory to God – peace in us through obedience – and is a testimony to a watching world.

Use these principles and the decisions you make will bring glory to God.

Pastor Scotty Smith wrote **A Prayer for Wisdom and Peace When Making Big Decisions**

I think it is a fitting way to end this morning.

Dear heavenly Father, you number our hairs and determine our days; you hang the stars and feed the sparrows; you open doors no one can shut and shut doors no one can open. Surely, we can trust you when the time comes for making big decisions, or for that matter, any decisions. I'm in just such a season again, Father, and I know I'm not alone. We will trust you for generous wisdom, straight paths and peaceful hearts, all for your glory.

How we praise you for being the decision-making-God. It's not our decisions, but yours that make all the difference. We will plan, but we trust you to order our steps. We will pray, but ask you to fix our prayers en route to heaven. We will seek counsel, but count on you to overrule faulty or incomplete input from our most trusted friends and mentors. We will search the Scriptures, but not looking for proof texts but for you, Father. All we want and need is you.

Free us from the paralysis of analysis—wanting make the right decision, more than we want to be righteous people; wanting to be known as wise people, more than we want to know you. Free us from the idolatry of assuming there's only one "perfect" choice in any given situation. Free us from making decisions primary for our comfort and other's approval, or fear their disapproval. Free us to know that good choices don't always lead to the easiest outcomes, especially at first. Free us from second and twenty-second guessing our decisions.

Father, no matter if it's wisdom about buying or selling, vocation or vacation, this place or that place, this person or that person, we know that in ALL things, your will is our sanctification—our becoming more and more like Jesus. Give us this passion; make it our delight.

So, Father, make us more and more like Jesus, even as we trust you for the opening and closing of doors that are in front of us. All for your glory—in our eating and drinking; and in our whatever's, whenever's and wherever's. So very Amen we pray, in the name of our reigning King, Jesus.



As you know our practice is to gather around the Lord's Table as a church twice a month.

As this year begins – it is very fitting that we pause to consecrate our lives our decisions – our eternity by eating and drinking around the Table of the Lord.

As we gather around this table our thoughts turn to the cross.

It is where our lives truly began.

The Lord's Table is a very simple affair. Bread, the cup. Symbols which remind us of the death of Christ for us.

It is a time when we stop and pause and think of the cross. The time when the sinless Son of God gave His life for us.

The innocent dying for the guilty.

His blood shed to wash away our sins.

His life for ours.

The cross is the heart of our faith. But at this time we don't just look back – we also look forward.

Let me read the words of Paul in Philippians 3:13-14:

One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We cannot change the past. It is done. It is covered by the blood of Christ. What we must do is press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

As this year begins, don't dwell on your sin, your slackness your failings. Dwell on the triumph of Christ. His blood washes away every failing. His blood strengthens us to live for Him from this day forward.

Don't get caught in the trap of lamenting over sin. Do spend time strengthening the inner man and woman in Christ.

This is a time to remember our unity in Christ.

This is a time to remember that our Lord who loves us will come again for us. He will finish the work of building His kingdom and we will feast with Him for all eternity.

These are the things we remember as we come to the Lord's Table.

It is a time for the family of God to gather. If you don't know Christ – please allow the bread and the cup to pass you by.

I am going to ask the stewards to pass among us with the bread. As they do – let us sing and reflect on the glory of the cross.

Communion Hymn

Paul wrote this:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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." In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Have a look at this bread. Jesus said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

The cup reminds us that through the blood of Christ we live.

As we eat this bread and drink this cup we remember that Jesus gave His body for us – that we might live.

So let us eat and drink together and remember Christ.

Prayer.

Cup    This Kingdom.