

Is It Sunday Yet?

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Introduction.

As most of you know, I like to watch a game or two of football occasionally, and as a result, I get pretty familiar with the commercials that the various networks run during the games. One of them is an ESPN commercial about this short, fat little balding dude who has the most miserable life at work. One of his co-workers has this horrible cackling laugh, another one has breath that's bad enough to peel paint, a third has this massive infected boil on his neck that he likes to show off, and so on. So this poor little guy suffers through his work day, but what keeps him going is the knowledge that when the work day is over, he gets to go home and watch Monday night football. So, finally, there he is at home, sitting happily in front of the TV, and the ESPN tagline says, "Is it Monday yet?"

After I saw this commercial a bunch at my parents' house over Christmas, I started thinking about it, and after I did, I started feeling sorry for the guy. I mean, what kind of a life is that? He trudges through this miserable existence, day after day, and the reward for all of his pain is that he gets to sit down and watch a football game. Obviously, he's a caricature, but until recently, I had a neighbor who quite literally centered his life around the Cubs. He lived and died by how they did, and I guess that means that he spends most of his life in an agony of frustration and suffering.

Thankfully, as Christians, we have far more to live for than that. We get to know the joy of the life of the spirit, and the centerpiece of that life, the place where we recharge our spiritual batteries, ought to be the assembly. For all of us, the more we assemble, the more we get out of it. Let's look, then, at why we should be asking, "Is it Sunday yet?"

Learning, Singing, and Partaking.

The central thing that we do when we assemble, every time we come together, is to **LEARN** from God's word. Peter tells us what our attitude toward the word ought to be in 1 Peter 2:2-3. I don't think any of us are in doubt as to what newborn babies are like. They live to eat, every two hours, morning, noon, and night. If they are not fed, they howl to the highest heavens until someone takes care of them. This is not because newborn babies choose to be obnoxious. It's because God created them that way. He knew what they would need, and unless they continually cry out for nourishment, they won't get what they must to grow and develop as they should.

Brethren, every bit as much as a newborn needs milk, Christians need the word of God. If we are cut off from it, we will die, and if we limit our supply of it, we won't grow in the things of the spirit. In fact, the more of the word we consume, the better off we will be, and the best place in any of our lives to learn about the word is right here. This is why strong, mature Christians come to the assembly every time it meets. It's not tradition. It's not habit. It's because they hunger to be fed from the Scripture, because that's what keeps them strong. On the other hand, every Christian who chooses not to assemble consistently is a weak Christian, because the hunger in their souls is going unsatisfied. Throughout this new year, if you aren't someone who assembles three times a week, make the commitment to doing that, and if you do, you will be amazed at how much more smoothly your spiritual life goes. All of us need the word.

The psalmist tells us how the word has such a beneficial effect in Psalm 119:97-99. This passage reminds me of what I used to do back when I worked for the University of Missouri College of Agriculture. The office part of my job involved running forage samples through a near-infrared analysis machine, and every time, before I would scan a series of samples, the first thing I did was run a special sample that the machine used to calibrate itself. Without that calibration first, the results I got would be useless. In the same way, when we come here and learn from God's word, the Scripture calibrates our minds. Every week, as we encounter the wickedness of the world, our minds get knocked off track a little bit. We forget a little bit of how God wants us to live. If that process continues unchecked, sooner or later, we fall away. When we study the word, though, that zeroes our minds back in again. It points us back to where God wants us to be. Without this spiritual calibration process, we will never make it to heaven. If we want to go to heaven, then, we need to be here as much as is humanly possible, because there is no better place to learn wisdom from God's word.

As part of this learning process, and because it gives us the opportunity to be thankful as well, our assembly here is important because here we can **SING**. Paul discusses our singing in Ephesians 5:18-20. Notice that in this passage, he identifies two main spiritual goals that singing fulfills. First, our song worship is an excellent time to learn. The very best hymns in our repertoire, hymns like "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and "The Battle Belongs to the Lord" actually cite more Scripture in a few short verses than I will use in an entire sermon. As we learn and memorize those hymns, then, we are doing nothing less than internalizing the word of God that will keep us safe and deliver us to heaven.

Second, our hymns are important because they give us opportunity to thank God. Unless we're just ungrateful wretches, this should be an opportunity we long for. God has given us so amazingly much, from the physical blessings we see to the even more impressive spiritual blessings that we can't see. When He is so gracious to us, it's the height of

rudeness not to thank Him and praise Him for all He does. When He designed the church, He set up our singing together as one of the main avenues for this praise. Every time we come together, then, we have the opportunity to glorify Him in song for His lovingkindness. Doesn't God deserve that? Then let's be here to join in it.

Likewise, we also **TAKE THE LORD'S SUPPER** because it's something that Jesus deserves. On some level, every Christian appreciates what Jesus did for us, but I don't think that any of us fully appreciates it. We don't, and perhaps cannot, fully grasp all that Jesus gave up, the suffering that He underwent, and most of all, the depth of the love that drove Him to die for us. We see the return that Jesus asks for all of this in 1 Corinthians 11:23-24. He simply wants us to remember, to share in this simple ceremony as a memorial of His death that will continue until He comes. Is this some outrageous thing that our Lord requests of us here? Does it tax us beyond endurance to be here every week to share in His supper? Brethren, I daresay that remembering Him in the way that He has asked is the least we can do, and we should be eager to do it. We should long to honor the courage and the mercy and the love of the One who sacrificed Himself for us. It's right to honor Him. Let's be sure that we are by assembling faithfully every week.

Contribution, Prayer, and Sharing.

Of course, we don't honor our Lord only by partaking of the Lord's Supper. We also show how much we respect and value Him when we **CONTRIBUTE**. Of all the things we do together, this is the one that has been given the worst name. Ever since the beginning, all sorts of greedy, evil preachers have used godliness as a means of gain. However, even though this expression of worship has been so abused, it's still something that we should be eager to share in. Look at the attitude of the Corinthians as described in 2 Corinthians 8:3-4. As we know from our recent studies of the church in Corinth, the Corinthians were not what we would call A-list Christians, but look at their attitude toward giving! They didn't make excuses about their poverty or their other financial needs. Instead, they gave beyond their means throughout the extended period in which this collection was taken up. They didn't grumble, even to themselves, about the need to give. They gave willingly. Finally, though, instead of looking upon the collection as a financial hardship, they considered it a spiritual blessing. They thought that when God gave them the opportunity to give, He was doing them a favor. That's why they gave the way they did, and that's why we need to give freely too.

We see some insight into what the Corinthians were thinking in Paul's instructions to rich Christians in 1 Timothy 6:18-19. Paul's point is that riches are not just a blessing. They are also an opportunity, an opportunity to become rich in good works. There's an old saying that says, "You can't take it with you," but in spiritual terms, that's actually not true. We can take it with us. However, we don't do that by holding on to our money with white knuckles. That's the money that we're sure to lose. The wealth that we keep is the wealth that we give away. When we do good with our money, especially by contributing to the needs of the church, we lay up treasure in heaven. As Paul says here, that generosity stores up a good foundation for the life to come. I don't know how the heavenly mechanics of that work out, but I do know that when God says contributing to the work is a good investment, He's telling me the truth. It might seem foolish for us to give away our wealth, but in reality, that's the single wisest thing we can do with it. Let's give accordingly.

Even beyond giving, our assembling together is important because it gives us a chance to **PRAY** together. Even our individual prayers are powerful, but the Bible implies that the prayers we share in together are even more powerful. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18 that whenever two or three are gathered together in His name, He Himself is present with them. That means that God is present with us right now, and if we start talking to Him, He is guaranteed to give us a listen. Look at an example of a first-century assembly prayer in Acts 4:31. As we know, the age of miracles is past. We can't expect the same physical demonstrations of God's answer. However, we can expect that He will answer us just as powerfully. There is evidence, in fact, of the power of prayer in our assembly today. I can remember going to see James Hensley in the ICU several years ago and coming away fearing for his life, yet now he's able to assemble with us every time the doors are open. Brethren, that's an answer to prayer. Even more than that, look at how God has blessed us spiritually, with this strong, vibrant church that is such a joy to work with. That too is an answer to prayer. When we pray together in the assembly, all of us have a part in these mighty works. Let's be sure to add more prayers in future.

Finally, though, we ought to be excited about the assembly because then we can **SEE ONE ANOTHER**. You may have noticed that at the top of our new bulletin that Jeff and Paula have put together, it says "Family bulletin", and when the Bible calls us the household of God, it tells us that we are indeed a spiritual family. When we come together, then, it ought to be like a family reunion for us, a chance for us to share our lives with one another. Look at how the church in Jerusalem is described in Acts 4:32. Even though that church had thousands of people in it, they were all still of one heart and one soul, and I believe that's the way the Joliet church is today. What a joy that is, after the stresses of the week, to know that we can come here to belong and be loved. Whatever our needs are, there are brethren here who will help fill them. Just ask Josh about the hordes of Christians who have descended on his house over the past month to help him remodel his basement. Nobody here is going to shut any brother out, but we can shut ourselves out. We can waste this precious resource by not coming, or not being sociable. Let's not make that mistake. Let's enjoy our spiritual family.