

# AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY - Part 3

## The Most Important Church Service You'll Ever Attend

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage: Acts 2:42  
Subject: To what did the early Christian devote themselves  
Complements: to the breaking of bread  
Exegetical idea: The early Christians devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.  
Homiletical idea: **Authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.**  
Purpose: To help my hearers to understand the identifying characteristics of an authentic Christian community and to encourage them to devote themselves to worship.

### Introduction

There are many powerful symbols in the Christian community. The cross. The blood of the Lamb. Light. But perhaps no Christian symbol is more significant than bread, and particularly the breaking of the bread.

This is the third sermon in our series on Authentic Christian Community. We are focusing on a single text of Scripture. In this text, Dr. Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, records an inspired description of an authentic Christian community. Can you tell me where our text is found? Acts 2:42. In that text, we discover four essential characteristics of an authentic Christian community. Let's look at the text together. Acts 2:42.

“.....”

The word of God tells us that the early Christian community devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. In the first sermon of this series, we noted that this early Christian community devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And what was the heart of that teaching? One sentence? Jesus is the Christ! They

were devoted to Jesus Christ. And any authentic Christian community will have Christ at the center! Amen? Everything centers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Without Jesus at the center, we are not an authentic Christian community.

Last week, we noted that this authentic Christian community, raised up in one day by the power of the Holy Spirit, also devoted themselves to koinonia—fellowship. They were connected together in love with God at the center. I hope that you noticed on your way into church that there is a “Get Connected Fair” in the lobby. You’ll see numerous opportunities to connect with a small group for ministry and personal growth, so you can get connected in a loving koinonia fellowship. I got connected this past week! I joined a men’s group, and my first meeting is tomorrow evening! A second characteristic of an authentic Christian community is that they are devoted to koinonia fellowship. They are connected together in love, with God at the center.

And then Dr. Luke mentions the third essential characteristic of this authentic Christian community, and, I pray, also of our church today. Let’s look again at our text in Acts 2:42. The Word of God says that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to...the breaking of bread. “ Literally, the breaking of the loaf.

What is that all about? The breaking of bread. Is Dr. Luke simply telling us that the early Christians liked picnics and potlucks?! I don’t think so. There’s more to this expression “the breaking of bread” than that. So what does it mean? They devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread,” “the breaking of the loaf”?

There is only one other place in the New Testament where this precise phrase is used. Does anyone know where it’s found? It’s in reference to Jesus. And it’s also recorded by Dr. Luke, in his Gospel record. Luke 24:35. Dr. Luke records, “.....” Let’s look at

the rest of the story, beginning with verse 13. Luke 24:13-27: :.....” What a Bible study that must have been! Because all of the Scriptures point to Jesus. “These are they that testify of Me,” Jesus said.

Then Dr. Luke continues, in Luke 24:28-35, “.....” Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Literally, “in the breaking of the loaf.” That’s the exact same phrase that we find in our text, Acts 2:42. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.

Now, I have a question for you. Why did the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus recognize Him when He broke the bread? Did they see the scars in His hands? Perhaps. Or was it something about that symbol of the bread and the breaking of the loaf? What do you think?

Where else do we see Jesus breaking the bread? At the Last Supper in the Upper Room. Let’s look at that narrative together. Luke also records this story in Luke 22:19.

“.....” I don’t know if Cleopas and his friend on the Emmaus road were there in the Upper Room when Jesus instituted what we call the Communion Service. Probably not. Scripture records that Jesus was with the Twelve. But I’m sure that the other disciples of Jesus, including Cleopas and his friend, heard what happened. They heard the Eleven repeat the words of Jesus when He broke the bread: “This is my body which is broken for you.” And now, as Jesus broke the bread with the disciples that He encountered on the road to Emmaus, I’m sure that they weren’t just thinking which piece was the biggest! That’s what I always used to think when I was little and something was being divided up! Which piece is the biggest! But I don’t think that’s what these disciples were thinking. The breaking of the bread was a symbol. It

reminded them of something else. The Bible tells us that they recognized Him by the breaking of the loaf.

And so every time the disciples re-enacted this Last Supper and broke the bread, it was a time to remember, a time of worship, a time of sacred communion with their Crucified and Risen Lord. And the early Christian community devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. They were a Christ-centered worshiping community. We don't know how often the early Christian community celebrated the Communion service. Was it every day? Every week? We don't know. But what we do know is this: They were devoted Christ-centered worship. They were devoted to the breaking of bread.

The New Testament gives us no specific instructions regarding the frequency for sharing in the Communion Service. Some Christian communities share in the Lord's Supper once a year. Others share four times a year. Others once a month. Others, once a week. Others every day. Is one more appropriate than another? That's something that each believer needs to be persuaded on in his or her own heart. The Lord simply says, "As often as you drink it," speaking of the symbol of His shed blood, "do it in remembrance of Me."

I can remember times when I was a young man, and I would visit other churches in London. If I had just celebrated communion, and I went to another church that was celebrating communion, I was very distressed. I didn't know what to do! After all, I had just celebrating communion just a week or two before! What a strange attitude! I'm not sure where I got that from. The Scriptures set no limit on how often we can break the bread in sacred communion. We should rejoice to share in the breaking of bread in remembrance of Jesus whenever the opportunity arises. I've been to wedding services that share in the breaking of bread. Is that

appropriate? Absolutely. I've participated in retreats where the participants share in the breaking of bread. Is that acceptable? It's not only acceptable. It's a sacred privilege. The early Christian community devoted themselves to the breaking of bread in remembrance and worship of Jesus.

Have you noticed that when some churches celebrate Communion some people stay away? Why is that? It can't just be because the service is longer! Why do some people stay away? I had a student some years ago in my Life and Teachings of Jesus class at Southern Adventist University who told me that it had been more than 5 years since she had participated in a communion service. I asked her "Why?" She said, "I feel unworthy. I've sinned and I don't feel worthy to come to the table of the Lord." And do you know what I said? "We're all unworthy! The sacred service of communion is not for worthy people. We come because we're not worthy. Only Jesus is worthy." Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain! (Hold up the symbols of the stained wool and the cross). Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain! We come to worship Jesus. He allowed His body to be broken for us and He allowed His blood to be shed for us to save us from the death that we all deserve. We come to celebrate His mercy and His grace. We come to participate in Christ-centered worship. And to say with the heavenly hosts, "You are worthy, O Lord." "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever!"

I shared this with my student, and some time later she came to me, with a smile on her face, and said, "I participated in the communion service, and it was wonderful!" Yes. The communion service is wonderful, because Jesus our Lord and Savior is wonderful! And when we take the symbols of His broken body and shed blood, we are saying YES again to Him as

Savior and Lord. Authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread

So I appeal to you. When the next time comes to share in the breaking of bread at the Communion service, don't stay away. It's the most important church service you'll ever attend. Highlight that worship service in your calendar. Don't miss it. A characteristic of an authentic Christian community is that we devote ourselves to worshipping Jesus our Savior, particularly in the breaking of the bread.

While most commentators agree that this expression in Acts 2:42, "the breaking of bread" is a reference to the re-enactment of the Last Supper at a time of sacred communion, some commentators suggest that this expression "the breaking of bread" may also refer to sharing a common meal or an agape meal. Can you think of another time when Jesus "broke bread" besides the Last Supper? That's right! The feeding of the five thousand. Dr. Luke records the story in Luke 9, beginning with verse 12. "....." This was a regular meal, not a communion service. And yet even this meal had special significance. The next day, Jesus said to His followers, "I am the bread of life." That bread which Jesus broke when He fed the 5000 was also a symbol of Himself. "I am the living bread," He said. And so every time the disciples shared a common meal, and broke bread, this was also a time of sacred communion with each other and with the Lord. That's why the word of God records in Acts 4:46, "they broke bread together in their homes and ate with glad and sincere hearts."

So every time you sit down at a meal, whether with brothers and sisters in Christ, just with your own family, or by yourself...every time to take a loaf of bread and break it, that can also be a time to worship Jesus, a time of sacred communion. When you break the bread at a

common meal, you can rejoice that Jesus is your bread of life. You can rejoice that Jesus is your living bread. You can rejoice that Jesus has made your life more than a dusty scuffle across some meaningless terrain. You can rejoice that because of Jesus, your life has meaning. Because of Jesus, your life has purpose. You are a loved child of God, redeemed at an infinite cost by the precious gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every meal can be a time of worship, a time of sacred communion. What an amazing thought!

I have two special invitations that I want to give you this morning. The first one doesn't come from me. It comes from Jesus. It's a personal invitation to share in the breaking of the bread next Sabbath, October 9, at 5:00 PM in the Upper Youth Room here at the Forest Lake Church. If you're sitting by the center aisle of the church, you'll see a stack of invitations beside you. Please take one and pass the pile of invitations to others on your row. This is an invitation that is sent with love, from Jesus. I pray that as a result of this sermon, you'll be inspired to share in this time of sacred communion next Sabbath, October 9, at 5:00 PM. Put that personal invitation in your Bible. Take it with you. And if you know someone who isn't here today, invite them to come too. Tell them that this is a special time to worship Jesus, our wonderful merciful Savior. And if you know someone who is unable to come to that service but would like to share in the breaking of the bread, please talk to one of our pastors or elders and we'll make provision for them too.

The second special invitation that I want to give you this morning isn't for next Sabbath. It's for now. Some day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. But I want to invite you to join with me in worshipping Jesus right now! When you think about our wonderful merciful Savior, there is no more

appropriate response than worship. That's why authentic Christians are passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.

So we're going to close this worship service by singing a song of worship. And as we sing, there may be someone who wants to come to the cross this morning in a special act of worship. Perhaps to accept Him as your personal Savior. Perhaps with a heart filled with joy and thanksgiving, to worship Him. As we sing, I invite you to worship Jesus with all of your heart, as the Spirit leads you. Let us stand as we sing! And sing with all of your heart! Worship Jesus with all of your heart!

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we praise you. We worship you, wonderful, merciful Savior. We thank you that you allowed your body to be broken for us. Holy Father, we thank you that you so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life! Holy Spirit, we praise you for moving in our midst this morning. Please set us free as authentic Christians to be passionate about Christ-centered worship, especially the breaking of the bread.

This is our prayer, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Invitation card: (sample)

You are personally invited to come and commune with Me. We will be breaking bread together on Sabbath, October 9, 2004, at 5:00 PM in the Upper Youth Room of the Forest Lake Church.

With all my love, Jesus

Symbols:

The cross - in the center of the platform

Ball of white wool with red stain (i.e. blood stain) - on table

Light (candle) - on table

Bread (loaf) - on table

Children's story

I want to talk with you this morning about symbols. Not cymbals, spelled with a "C" at the beginning, like you play in a marching band or orchestra. But symbols, spelled with an "S" at the beginning. A symbol is something that reminds us of something else. A symbol represents something else. This is a symbol. What is this? (A flag). This flag is a symbol of which country? (The United States of America). You're right. This flag reminds us of the United States of America. How many of you were born in the USA? Then this is your flag!

Here's another symbol. What is this? A cross. This cross is a symbol. What does it remind us of? (Jesus). And what about Jesus? (That He is our Savior. He died for our sins). That's right. The cross is a symbol.

I'm going to talk today in the sermon about another symbol. Does anyone know what this is? (Crackers? Unleavened bread). On the night before Jesus was crucified on the cross, He was eating a special supper with His disciples. And He took some unleavened bread. And He decided to make that unleavened bread into a symbol. He wanted that unleavened bread to remind His disciples, and all of us, of something else. He said to them, "This is My body which is broken for you." Now, it wasn't actually His broken body, was it? No. He hadn't even died yet. But it was to become a special symbol. Every time His disciples ate that special meal, which we call Communion, the unleavened bread would remind them of His broken body. The unleavened bread would remind them that Jesus loved them and died on the cross to save them from their sins.

I brought some unleavened bread this morning. It hasn't been blessed or set apart as holy for the Communion service. But it is still a special symbol. And you can take a piece if you want to. When you eat it, remember that Jesus loves you and that He died to save you. It's a very special symbol for Christians. OK? You can take a piece as you go back to your seats.