

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**Episode 23****Reflections on Table, Time, and Church****July 21, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

In this episode, Matthew talks about the benefits of taking weekly communion and following the Christian calendar. He reminds us that Christianity is a communal faith -- one that promotes unity with Christ and each other. There are no "lone ranger" Christians, and rugged individualism is not part of our ancient faith. As a church, therefore, we are called to the communion table, and we are summoned to fix our time and attention around the rhythms of the biblical story -- the center of which is Jesus the Messiah.

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www.matthewhalsted.com

Transcript:

00:00 Hey everybody, welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted. My name is Matthew Halstead and it's a privilege to be with you once again. Well, a couple of weeks ago I mentioned that I was going to mix up the podcast a little bit. I mentioned how every Tuesday morning we were going to keep posting and publishing long form studies kind of like what we are doing through the book of Romans now. These are in depth studies and they last about 45 minutes to an hour and they are designed to take us deep into the text of scripture. Those are released every Tuesday morning along with that we also do some interviews and things of that sort. I mentioned how we are going to continue to do that every Tuesday morning but I was also going to make an addition to, I guess you could call it the program line up. I was going to make some short form episodes. Episodes that that last 5-10 minutes or so. And I would be releasing those throughout the week. I don't know how many we'll do throughout the week. It will probably be varied as the days, weeks, and months go on. But anyway, I'm excited because today is the first time we are going to do one of these short form little episodes. So anyway, even though it's a short episode I hope it's a huge blessing to you. Today's topic is what I'm calling Reflections on Table, Time, and Church.

1:25 When it comes to church, one thing I've learned is that "community" is important. In fact, the communal life is necessary. And by "community," I mean more than a place for shop talk (as important as that is). I mean something along the lines of habitual participation, constant give-and-take, and sacramental union. I mean *koinōnia*.

That's why I think there's something to be said about taking communion weekly and following the church calendar. There's a lot to be gained by submitting one's life weekly to the timely rhythms of the biblical story -- at the heart of which is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

First, consider sacred time. Ours is an era of speed. And haste. We are pulled in so many different directions. We are as fragmented as we are busy. It's lamentable. But by attuning our lives to the

Christian calendar, we remind ourselves that this frantic world isn't ultimate and that we are not enslaved to its chaotic pace. The modern life is a ritual of rush, a merry-go-round of noisy excess and busyness.

But the Christian calendar offers an alternative ritual, one filled with seasons of feasting and fasting, rhythms of praise and pause. Rituals shape us. By learning how to fast (at Lent), we say no to worldly passion. By preparing for Christmas (at Advent), we critique commercialism. The calendar, like any good clock, gives our lives framework. It shapes our habits and, hence, creates our lifestyles.

Our Sundays are opportunities for training. They can teach us how to inject rhythms of peace into a hectic week. In short, the Christian Calendar offers us a paradigm for wholeness -- a deep shalom -- as we pass our days in wild exile.

3:23 Speaking of wholeness, consider the Eucharist. Weekly communion is absolutely beneficial. At the Table, we commune with Christ. He is present there. The Communion is no mere memorial (as someone once said to me, memorials are for dead people). To the contrary, Paul calls this a lively "participation" in, or "communion" with, Christ (*koinōnia*; 1 Cor 10:16). Our weekly gatherings give us an opportunity to commune with Christ. If Paul is right (and I have no reason to think he's not), then we'll need to take the Eucharist often and seriously. It is a means of grace.

The benefits are many. As we participate in Christ, we remind ourselves that we are members of one another; we are the church, not merely individuals. And the church is made up of more than simply those who happen to be alive physically. The body of Christ, after all, is ancient—as is the practice of communion. The Table reminds us, then, of our union with all those who have gone before us. It teaches us to think twice about prioritizing the voices of the living just because they are living (that's a hat tip to Chesterton). The living have no corner on truth. We are Christians precisely because the Fathers and Mothers of ages past were faithful to point us to the Gospel, to Word and Sacrament. Communion continues the ancient ritual of feasting on Christ. And that ritual shapes us, forms us, feeds us.

Tradition is important because it cannot be denied -- you are a traditioned person. There are, after all, no "lone ranger" Christians, after all. You believe what you believe because your belief was developed (and is being developed) within your particular tradition and community. These traditions and communities taught you how to read Scripture and how to pray. We all have traditions. And that's okay, provided that we realize it.

The key, I think, is to think deeply about what sort of tradition we align ourselves with. Is it a tradition that promotes awareness of our ancient faith and its practices or is it a tradition that promotes, say, rugged individualism? That's a good question to consider.

Back to communion. One common fear that people have is that, if we take it too often, it will lose its meaning. And yet, nobody thinks this is true of the weekly sermon or the weekly giving of tithes. Consider too how, in some traditions, it's quite acceptable to require kids to say the pledge of allegiance every morning at school. This is a ritual. And only the patriotic—those who have been formed and shaped by the practice of pledging allegiance daily—would promote such a ritual for the purpose of making citizens of the state. And that's the point: rituals shape people. Rituals form and strengthen our loves. If secular rituals are good for the shaping of citizens, then sacred rituals are likewise good for the shaping of Christians. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

Last thing. Some versions of Christianity can be absolutely exhausting. Some traditions emphasize "works" to the exclusion of faith. Other traditions emphasize "faith" to the exclusion of

works. Depending on the day, we might find ourselves bankrupt of both. The fact is that our faith and works are feeble. We are merely mortals. We are contingent creatures, whose very existence depends on something else—or should I say, *someone* else. And at some point, we need to realize this. In other words, we are a people who need to be carried. Our religion, our Faith, must carry and nurture and feed us—not the other way around. We need to be molded into rhythms of prayer and praise, feasting and fasting, communion and contemplation. And that's why we need Time and Table.

- 7:45 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.