

## **Only Jesus Counts**

December 9, 2018

Dennis Lee Curtis was arrested in Rapid City, South Dakota. Curtis was a thief, an armed robber to be exact. But he had a personal code of conduct for his activity. When arrested the police found this code written on a piece of paper in the man's wallet. Here is what it said:

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to.
2. I will take cash and food stamps—no checks.
3. I will rob only at night.
4. I will not wear a mask.
5. I will not rob mini-marts or 7-Eleven stores.
6. If I get chased by cops on foot, I will get away. If chased by a vehicle, I will not put the lives of innocent civilians on the line.
7. I will rob only seven months out of the year.
8. I will enjoy robbing from the rich to give to the poor.

If he kept all of his rules, we might give him brownie points for self-discipline. But his code of conduct counted nothing for him when he stood before the judge. In a court of law his obedience to his code did not count in his favor.

What counts for taxes? Every year we have to pay income taxes to the federal and state governments. The only thing that counts to those governments on your behalf is the dollars owed by you. Pledging the flag doesn't count towards what you owe. Watching fireworks or a parade on the fourth of July doesn't count towards what you owe. Voting in elections does not count towards what you owe. The ONLY thing that counts is the dollars, paid in full.

What counts in high school? To get a high school diploma, a person has to complete 26 credits in various subjects. And they have to be the right subjects. You can't take four years of only gym classes all day long and get a high school diploma. You have to complete four credits of English, three of social studies, four of math, and much more. You have to attend classes, complete assignments, and pass tests, in order to get those credits and that high school diploma. Taking apples for the teachers doesn't count. Joining the chess club after school doesn't count. Running for student government doesn't count. Selling candy bars to raise money for the band doesn't count. The ONLY thing that counts is completing successfully, the listed requirements.

What counts for Christmas? We are coming up on Christmas. I'm sure you want your Christmas to be pleasing to the Lord. But, what counts as a correct Christmas celebration? What is God looking for in your decorations, on your Christmas tree, for your presents, and for church services? What counts with God for Christmas?

The truth is, none of these things count. God doesn't command us to observe Christmas, so there are no requirements, no expectations. God doesn't really care if you put up a Christmas tree or not.

**What does it mean when we say something counts?  
It means we earn something from someone.**

To say that our celebration of Christmas counts with God, we are saying that we get extra credit of some kind for observing Christmas. It means God is going to send extra blessings our way for observing Christmas. That would only be true if God required us to celebrate Christmas.

God doesn't tell us to celebrate Christmas. We're told to remember the death of Christ, and all that it means for us. We are NOT told to remember the birth of Christ. We enjoy celebrating the birth of Christ. But we aren't commanded by God to do so. We are not rewarded by God for doing so. Celebrating Christmas does not count towards your salvation. It doesn't count towards your inheritance with Christ. So it really doesn't matter how you observe Christmas.

We are currently camped on a particular passage of scripture in our study of the letter of Colossians in the Bible. It is this one. I have paraphrased verses 1-2. Our focus is verses 4 & 8.

**Colossians 2:3-4, 8 (NIV)** (I want you to fully know) "**Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.**

**... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.**

We have looked at several types of "fine-sounding arguments" that people make use to add or take away from the good news of Jesus. Some people add parts of the Law of Moses. We considered that three weeks ago. Some people add supernatural activities which we covered two weeks ago. Both of those sermons are on our website.

This morning we are going to look how people make up rules that supposedly count with God. This is another danger of adding to the good news of Jesus Christ.

This is not something new. The Pharisees took the commands of God and expanded them, making up new traditions that became new rules. Then they forced them on others. Jesus condemned this in them. Yet some Christians do the same thing. They make up rules about the externals of the Lord's Supper, baptism, days of worship, and more. They focus on externals instead of internals.

We're going to consider this question in the context of the Lord's Supper. We are not commanded to celebrate Christmas. But we ARE commanded by Jesus to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The danger is that we focus on the externals and ignore the internals of what should happen in the Lord's Supper.

We are going to observe the Lord's Supper together in a few moments. But let's talk about what God is looking for in our observance.

For the last several years we have been using some small oyster crackers in the Lord's Supper. They are only lightly salted, are a good serving size, and very convenient. We haven't always used these. At times we have used leavened loaves of bread, matzo crackers broken into pieces, unsalted crackers, home made wafers and even some of those tasteless wafers from the Christian bookstore. We could use many things. The

danger, in using just anything, though, is that the food itself may distract us from what the Lord's Supper is really all about.

I would not use potato chips or cookies or wheat thins. Any of these would certainly distract ME. In the same way, I find the tasteless wafers distracting. I want to focus on Jesus in the Lord's Supper. I should focus on Jesus in the Lord's Supper. So the elements we use should not draw attention to themselves away from Jesus.

But there is no instruction anywhere in the Bible about what to use or not use to represent the body of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. Some Christians get real legalistic about this and say it has to be unleavened bread or crackers because Jesus used unleavened bread. Well of course he did. It was Passover week. They weren't allowed to eat leavened bread during the whole week. There wasn't a loaf of leavened bread anywhere in Jerusalem that week, unless the Roman soldiers made some.

But nowhere does it say only unleavened bread counts as a true Lord's Supper. If you are going to be that legalistic about it, you should use barley bread. Some churches, aware of food allergies to wheat are switching to rice flour products. But some Christians object and say that wheat has to be used because Jesus used wheat.

There is no proof of that. In fact, the most common flour for most people in that day was the less priced barley flour. Likely Jesus used barley bread to initiate the Lord's Supper.

**Any emphasis on the type of food to use in the Lord's Supper focuses on the external instead of the internal.**

Many of the same issues involve the cup. Jesus probably used watered down wine since that was a common drink for that day. Jesus uses the cup as a symbol for His blood, so we assume it was a product of the grape. The original Passover instructions said nothing about a drink. Wine was not required for the Passover meal.

At the first Passover meal they may have had wine. But at the second one, the following year, when they were out in the wilderness, likely they only had water. Any wine they brought from Egypt would have been used up. And they weren't growing any grapes as they traveled through the wilderness.

Today some churches use grape juice and others use wine. Most Baptist churches, at least in America, are historically and culturally opposed to the use of alcoholic beverages as a church. So it would be distracting to many to get a cup of wine. It would also be bad if you were a recovering alcoholic.

I admit I have watered down the grape juice when we did not have enough. But we don't have to use a grape product at all.

**Aatami Kuortti**, a Lutheran pastor in Russia, was sentenced to ten years of hard labor in a concentration camp because of his refusal to become a spy for the government. A very large proportion of the prisoners were Christians, whose only offense was living their Christian faith.

One of the Christian prisoners received a package from home, a little bread and a few apples. The first thing he thought of was that it would be possible now to celebrate the Lord's Supper. He proposed this to Pastor Kuortti.

The pastor thought it impossible. "The guards would certainly interfere."

"But it is all arranged," said the man. "I have already crushed the apple juice in a mug and the crusts will serve as communion bread. We can have the holy ordinance in the corner and the Russians, if they see us will think we are drinking tea."

The pastor later shared, "I gladly agreed with the proposal. After reciting Scripture, I blessed the bread and the mug of apple juice, and we ate the Lord's Holy Communion."

I would think that counted with God, not for salvation, but as worship. When we observe the Lord's Supper, God is not looking in the cups and plates to see what we are using. He is looking inside of US. God looks at the heart.

### **When you partake of the Lord's Supper...**

... **think about the cost to Jesus.** Jesus paid for your salvation with his life. Never forget that. Never take it for granted. Never let it become routine. Keep it as special in your heart and prayers.

... **thank Jesus.** You should be thankful for your sins forgiven, thankful for your adoption into God's family, thankful for the Holy Spirit's presence in you, thankful for the promise of eternal life, thankful for daily guidance, and thankful for your church family. Express your thanks to Jesus this morning.

... **confess sins.** Paul goes on in this letter to tell the Christians at Corinth that they should examine themselves for sin before they partake of the Lord's Supper. They should judge themselves as to their attitudes towards Christ and His church.

... **recommit yourself to Him.** Every day we should reaffirm who Jesus is to us and our commitment to Him.

If your heart is right towards Christ in your observance of the Lord's Supper, your act is true worship and acceptable to God. It doesn't matter whether you use pita bread and grape juice or potato chips and grape soda.

Don't make up rules about things that don't matter and ignore the things that matter very much. You can eat unleavened bread and wine while thinking about where to go for lunch. That isn't a true Lord's Supper observance. You can use potato chips and diet coke and humbly submit yourself to Christ. And that IS a true Lord's Supper.

As we share the Lord's Supper this morning, remember how Jesus suffered on the cross. Remember your sins. Remember God's promise of forgiveness. Thank Him. Submit yourself to Him.

If you have personally received Jesus into your heart as your Savior and Lord, you are welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper with us today.

( observance of the Lord's Supper )

### Invitation

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is that Jesus died to pay the entire penalty of our sins. Believe this. Believe in his purposeful, sinless death and resurrection. Receive Jesus as your savior and repent of your sin. Turn your life over to Him, and you will be saved.

You receive Him by prayer and can do so now. There is a sample prayer at the end of the sermon outline.

(silent prayer)

### Worship Response Hymn

**Isaiah 6:1 (NIV) In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.**

**Isaiah 6:5-8 (NIV) "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."**

**Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"**

**And I said, "Here am I. Send ME!"**

He did not even know what the task was. What he knew was that he was a sinner saved by God's grace. And in his joy he was ready to serve His God.

Can you give yourself to Jesus this morning. Can you sing, "Lord, here am I," to him?

486 Lord, Here Am I, verses 1-2