

† The Heart of Christ ~ the Lord's Table (Matthew 26:26-29)

“...this is My body...this is My blood...”(Matthew 26:26, 28)

Remembering Jesus **Matthew 26:26-29**

26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.”

This morning, being the third Sunday of the month and therefore one of the times we have set apart to practice and participate in the command to remember the Lord Jesus' sacrifice and death for our sins, I thought it prudent to take a break from our look that the High Priestly prayer of Jesus for His Church and call our attention to this event we call “the Lord's Supper” or communion. It is strange to me how doing something routinely can quickly rob it of its importance; its significance and its wonder.

I can still remember back in one of the first churches where I partook of communion as a new believer at the ripe age of 17. The Pastor would call the leaders forward, say a few words, share a few Scriptures and then in a seemingly awkward display of choreography, these men proceeded to pass out tiny pieces of bread and plastic cups of juice on silver plates (much like we do it here).

I remember reading through the accounts of the Lord's Supper and wondering what exactly was Jesus doing and saying? What was it that Jesus wanted me to remember? And how was it that these “elements” – just pieces of bread (tiny bits of tasteless cardboard it seemed) and cups of juice, helped me do this?

For the first few years of my Christian experience I heard those words monthly, **“This is My body...”** and **“this is My blood of the covenant...”** and wondered, “What makes this so important?” “Why is this one of the two ordinances or commands that Jesus said the church, professing believers in Jesus Christ, are to gather together regularly in order to honor Him. As a progressed in my faith, I found out through reading Church history that many believers gave their lives just in order to remember Jesus with other believers. And yet today believers can take such a time for granted and come up with excuse after excuse in order to excuse themselves from this beloved and blessed command of the Lord Jesus, “Do this, all of you together, in remembrance of Me!”

This morning I desire to present to you the Lord's Supper, not as being just some ritual that we are obligated to endure, but rather to see it afresh and anew as a precious part of Church life. To celebrate and participate in the Lord's Supper is to be one of the high points in a believer's life. And even as we seek to make every effort to attend our children's graduations, or the wedding of a loved one; or even to go see the latest and greatest movie because we “have to see it”; I pray that we would come to appreciate and love the opportunity to partake together the Lord's Supper, making every effort to rejoice in such a time. For it is at this time, right now that we, as God's people, are called together to remember that Jesus died a sacrificial death, dying in our place on that cross, enduring the wrath of God we deserved so that we, as small and insignificant as we are, we might be brought into a right and full relationship with the Holy God who created us.

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What I hope to accomplish this morning is to somehow, by means of the context of Matthew 26:26-29, bring more vividly to your life and heart the death of Jesus for you. It is Jesus Himself who teaches us that it is the remembrance of Him through this meal, the Lord's Supper, that helps us do this. So then, let us consider three things to accomplish this purpose of rightly remembering the Lord Jesus; first the Supper; second the Symbols and finally the Spiritual realities.

I. The Supper

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples...

Let us never forget that what we call the Last Supper or the Lord's Supper was really just a small but significant alteration to a part of one the most celebrated holy days on the Jewish calendar. Jesus and His disciples were faithfully observing the Law of God by partaking of the Passover meal. Matthew tells us that Jesus and the disciples were well into the celebration saying, “while they were eating...” meaning that at least several aspect of the Passover meal had been observed. Here Jesus blesses some bread and passes it out to His disciples. Of course bread, specifically unleavened bread was an important part of the Passover meal and was eaten with every element. The main course of the Passover meal was the lamb. But this was not just some lamb picked up at the local meat market. This was a lamb that was slaughtered specifically for those who offered it, to remind them that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Along with the lamb there were bitter herbs that were to remind them of their ancestors' bondage in Egypt. There was a mixture of apples and nuts called Cheroset that pictured the mud and the straw the Israelites used to make bricks for Pharaoh's work projects. As I said the bread was unleavened because it had to be made quickly and there would be no time for it to rise before Israel would leave Egypt. Jesus and His disciples were remembering all these things. They were remembering all these things. But then, to the shock of the disciples, Jesus made an alteration to this ancient celebration. Jesus instituted a new tradition for the Church. But never forget that Jesus linked this new tradition to the idea of the redemption of God's people from bondage.

Every time the Israelites celebrated Passover, it would have been a bitter/sweet event. It was bitter as they recalled the hard bondage and slavery under the Egyptians. It would have been sweet as they recalled the power of God to lead their ancestors out of Egypt with mighty signs and wonders that included the ten plagues along with the death of the firstborn of all who did not have the blood of the lamb sprinkled on the doorposts. They remembered the parting of the Red Sea and then God's provisions in the desert. Never forget that the purpose of this meal was for those who were partaking of it to talk about the meaning of each event and symbol as they celebrated the freedom and redemption God provided. The evening would end with the singing of hymns (see verse 30) which included Psalms 113-118. These Psalms are called the Hallel (from Hallelujah) meaning praise as the Israelites praised the Lord for their salvation from bondage and slavery.

But here, in Matthew 26, as Jesus instituted this new Supper, the necessity for celebrating the Passover feast ended. Never again would a lamb need to be offered up as a temporary covering for sin. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, **“For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”** The bondage of Israel had served as a picture of the greater bondage of man in

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sin. The slavery of Israel to Pharaoh depicted man's slavery to Satan, the prince of the power of the air. And the fear of Israel in Egypt was a revelation of the fear of man for death. But no longer was a lamb and its blood needed year by year, for we are to remember Christ as our Passover who, according to 1 Peter 3:18 and many other texts, **“died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...”** Israel's need for deliverance, their need to be redeemed out of Egypt serves to remind us that we need to be delivered and redeemed from the powerful effects of sin.

And consider this, the hope of redemption, of salvation, of being delivered from something dire and horrific is only “needed” if someone sees himself as being in a hopeless condition. The Scriptures remind us that apart from Christ everyone is in a hopeless condition; enslaved to the “prince of the power of the air” – that is Satan; held captive in the death of their own sin and trespasses and living in the fear of judgment and death. Redemption is needed and a Redeemer is longed for. Who would pay the price for the lives of the Israelites? For a time, it would be an innocent, unblemished lamb on Passover. On the Day of Atonement, the blood of a goat would be offered in the stead of the blood of the people to stay off the judgment of God for their sins. But today we will celebrate the fact rather than the blood of bulls and goats that can never truly take away sin, we have the Son of Man. We know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, as our Passover Lamb; truly as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Oh thought of thoughts, that God Himself became man, He joined the human race in order to save us; in order to redeem us. And being the Son of God, fully God, His death would be of infinite value. Being the Son of Man, fully human, He could rightly bear the wrath of God for His own.

Let us consider again that Passover Lamb. According to the book of Exodus, the LORD informed Israel that He would pass through Egypt and slay the firstborn of every man and every beast unless He saw what? Unless He saw the blood of the lamb. Therefore each family was to slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts of their home. We read of this in Exodus 12:23-27:

23 For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. 24 And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 When you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. 26 And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' 27 you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.' And the people bowed low and worshiped.

What was it that kept Israel from experiencing the judgment of God as did the Egyptians? Was it because these Israelites were better, were holier, or had done anything to merit God's deliverance? No, the only thing that stood between Israel and the judgment of God was the blood of the lamb. It was the sacrifice of that lamb that stood in their place of death. It was that lamb that provided them salvation.

How many lambs died the night of the first Passover in order to save the Israelites? How many lambs had died over the centuries that Israel observed the Passover? But today we celebrate a greater Lamb; the Lamb of God, who became our Substitute, who stood in our place;

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who suffered for all who would believe on Him the full wrath of God for their sins. And here then in Matthew 26:26-27 Jesus points to His pending death as the disciples' substitute saying, **“This is My body...”** the Lamb slain; think about this; talk about this; ponder this; and **“This is My blood...”** that provides full forgiveness of sins; think about this; talk about this; do this in remembrance of Me. Let us now then consider the symbols of the Lord's Supper.

II. The Symbols

In Matthew 26:26-28, two very simple and common elements are given with which to rightly remember Lord's Supper: bread and wine. How simple are these symbols? Even today bread serves as a staple, as a primary source of food and sustenance. And the wine was also a common part of Jewish feasts and celebrations. So it is not unusual that these elements would be seen as part of the Passover meal. But what is unusual is the new meanings that Jesus ascribed to these otherwise common elements.

Isn't that just the wisdom of God? The Lord takes two things that all of God's people would have access to for all times and sets them up to be lasting memorials of the price that Jesus paid for the Church. Jesus uses the bread and wine, but He does not include the bitter herbs or that cheroset. Why? Because the bitter herbs and cheroset were reminders of bondage and now, because of the death of Christ, we are free from such bondage. Therefore the focus of the Lord's supper is entirely upon the work of the Lamb in giving both body and blood for salvation.

The Bread

Let us look at Matthew 26:26 again. We read, **“While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body...’.**” This last phrase, “This is My body...” has caused a lot of people trouble. Some of you know from your Roman Catholic background that Catholicism believes the bread literally becomes the body of Christ. Let us not forget however that the Passover Meal was filled with symbolism and so it is obvious that the bread at the Lord's Table is also symbolic. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the exalted God-Man now sits at the Father's right hand, not in this silver plate waiting to be served. We do not need Christ to be crucified and sacrificed again and again. For the author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus has been sacrificed once for all. We read in Hebrews 10:10, **“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”**

The bread is a picture of the sacrifice of Christ. There is no special grace imparted through the bread. There is nothing magical or even mystical about the bread. What is important is that as believers who gather together to obey Jesus in remembering His sacrifice for us, we do, by faith, have the very presence of Jesus among us. Grace is not given to us because we eat bread or drink the juice, but much grace is given to believers who gather together in faith to look to Jesus and remember what He has done for us.

When Jesus makes this command, this imperative to “take, eat; this is My body,” He is calling for us to consider Him, to remember all that He has done for us from His incarnation to His perfect life, to His death on the cross and to His resurrection. Let us remember Him, that He came to redeem; that He came to save us. And let us remember the great price of our salvation; the wrath He bore and the death He died that we might be brought near to God.

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The Cup

As some of you may remember from our Seder meal, the celebration of the Passover meal revolves around four cups that are partaken of at four different times in the meal. The first cup is the cup of Sanctification, as the people set themselves apart for the meal. The second cup is the cup of Deliverance as the people remember the mighty hand of God to bring Israel out of Egypt. The third cup is the cup of Redemption, depicting the price that was paid to save Israel. This third cup is taken just after the eating of the main meal. It appears that this cup, the cup of Redemption, that Jesus used to change the whole tenor of the meal. With the cup of Redemption, Jesus said to the disciples, "**Drink from it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins**" (Matthew 26:27-28).

Now, just as we noted with the bread, Jesus is not suggesting that the wine or the juice actually becomes His blood. The blood of Christ was shed once for all, at the cross. It does not continue to be shed. No continued or new sacrifice for sin is needed. This is why Jesus declared with power, "**It is finished!**" (John 19:30). With that statement we are to know that nothing more is needed for our atonement; nothing else can be added to secure our salvation. Heaven is assured us and we, as the redeemed, as those who belong to Christ by faith, are commanded, expected to celebrate and remember this truth as often as we determine to partake of the Lord's Supper together. I am both grateful and saddened that Jesus had to command us to remember Him this way. Grateful that He tells us in effect that this corporate act of remembering Him is worship and it honors Him. But it saddens me that something which ought to be the very joy, the very determination of the believer would have to be commanded. We are to remember, as we drink the juice, which symbolizes the blood of Christ, the great cost by which we, individually and as a group, are brought near to God.

III. The Spiritual Realities

Having considered the Supper and the Symbols, let us now end by looking at the Spiritual realities we are to enjoy as a result of this celebration. Let me share with you a statement made by John Calvin, the great Reformer, concerning the Lord's Supper. He said,

But there are three mistakes against which it is here necessary to be on our guard; first, not to confound the spiritual blessing with the sign; secondly, not to seek Christ on earth, or under earthly elements; thirdly, not to imagine any other kind of eating than that which draws into us the life of Christ by the secret power of the Spirit, and which we obtain by faith alone [Calvin's Commentaries, XVII, 209].

In other words, what is the blessing found in the Lord's Supper; who is the one blessing in the Lord's Supper and finally; who are the blessed because of the Lord's Supper?

First, the blessing found in the Lord's Supper. As we have already noted, there is no blessing to be found in the symbols of the meal themselves. There is no magic in the bread or the cup. It is not as if eating the bread and drinking from the cup will make us stronger, or impart to us any more grace. Calvin warned against confusing the signs, the bread and cup, with the blessing itself, which is a remembrance of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished for us. The focus here is not to be upon the elements themselves but rather upon the One who the elements represent. The blessing comes when our attention moves past the elements and as we

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come face to face with the mystery of God's great love and mercy; that He send His beloved Son to this earth, to bear our sin; to endure the wrath of God we deserved upon that cross. Who is Jesus Christ to me?

Jesus said, **“Drink from it, all of you...”** Everyone cleansed by the blood of Christ ought to have it as his or her deepest desire and greatest determination to be with the “all of you” Jesus speaks of here. This is a corporate event of highest honor and greatest importance. Throughout Church History, saints have died trying to celebrate the Lord's Table with others. For them, they saw the gathering of the saints to remember the Lord's death for their sins by means of the bread and the cup as of greatest importance. How about you? How important is it to you to obey the command of the Lord Jesus Christ? To rightly remember Him in such a time as this?

The second warning of Calvin calls us to remember who is the one blessing. The One who blesses us is the giver of the command. By His shed blood we are forgiven. By His wounds we are healed. By His death we are brought to life. By His taking our place we are made righteous. By His being broken on the cross we are made fit for glory. The bread and the cup are to remind us of these things, but they can never supply these things. How many blessings can you recount as your own because of Jesus death on the cross for you? And where do those blessings come from? Are they yours by right? Are they yours because you have worked for them? Are they yours because you belong to the right family or the right church? No...they are yours by faith because you believe them to be undeservedly received from the Blessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember this. Let us do as Calvin reminds us, “Our minds must not be fixed on the earth, but must ascend upwards to the heavenly glory in which [Jesus] dwells.” For there our Blessor dwells.

Finally then, who are the blessed? Who are the ones who receive the blessings from the Blessor? The answer seems easy enough. The blessed one are those who by faith believe that Jesus came for them, that He died for their sins, that He sent His Holy Spirit to them to make them like Himself, absolutely Holy. This is the essence of what Jesus taught in John 6:53-55 saying, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.”**

What is Jesus saying here? Is this a call to cannibalism? No. But it is a call to be absorbed in and with Christ. It is a call to have Christ in you, the hope of glory. And how is Christ taken in? Beloved, Christ is taken in by the supernatural work of His Spirit. The Spirit opens our eyes to show us we are sinners in need of the Savior. The Spirit causes us to cry out to the Lord for salvation. The Spirit indwells us and empowers us to walk, to live, to love and to act even as Jesus did. Every time you get to partake of the bread and drink the cup, it is to be a reminder of what Jesus has accomplished for you so that you might no longer live for yourself, but for Him who died and rose again.

Beloved, let us not forget; let us not neglect, let us not come casually to the Lord's Table. I realize that in our busy lives it may sometimes seem like the Communion service is just another thing to do. But oh that we would come to see it as the very life and heart of our existence as the body of Christ. I know that sometimes we might worry about our little ones having to sit through such a service. But don't worry about their sitting. Let them see the elements pass by them; let them hear of their meanings; talk to them what they picture; let them come to realize that they are

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not yet a part of those of faith, who have believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that the children participated in the Passover and it was to be the youngest who could read who asked, "What does this rite mean to you?" Oh that you would put your children in that position, to as you, "What does the Lord's Table mean to you?" And then, that you might be able to answer, "It is my remembering Him in the Incarnation, in His righteous life, in His substitutionary death on the cross, and in His providing full satisfaction of God's eternal justice for me." May the Lord's Supper be our looking unto Jesus Christ and remembering with deepest satisfaction that He alone can forgive us of our sins and give us new and everlasting life.

Soli Deo Gloria

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