

THE LORD'S SUPPER & ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Our meditation for this morning is a familiar passage. But I think that there is much that we can unpack from it. And we need to do this often so that it doesn't in any way get to the point where we get complacent about the profound meaning that these words have for us.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord Himself. On the night when He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then He broke it in pieces and said, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, He took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and His people – an agreement confirmed with My blood. Do this in remembrance of Me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until He comes again.

Will you pray with me?

Almighty God, through Your Spirit, would you make this special beautiful memorial instituted by Your Son, meaningful to us in ways that we may have forgotten, or in ways that we never thought of before. But Lord, bring this into a great sense of reality for each one of us today. Lord Jesus, in Your name we ask this. Amen.

When we look at this passage, there are essentially three things that we are told, and all of them have to do with remembering, or calling to mind, or recalling; that when we come to the table of the Lord, we come remembering three things. What are those three things?

- We come remembering Jesus,
- We come remembering the covenant,
- We come remembering that He is going to come again and that we ought to proclaim that coming until He comes.

Let's look at these three areas in some detail and see what we can learn from it.

WE REMEMBER JESUS.

What do we remember of Jesus? What must we call to mind as we think about Jesus? I've listed four things that I think are essential – things that came to my mind that I'd like to give to you. It's possible that there's much, much more that you can call to mind as well. But for now, these are the four things that I'd like for us to meditate on today as we move towards the Lord's table.

1. His incredible love for us.

We read in Philippians 2 how He left all the beauty, the splendor that was His in heaven, and He came down to earth because He recognized that, in and of ourselves, we were incapable of overcoming this sin barrier of trying to reach God, which we were vainly trying to do and yet finding it impossible under the restraints of sin and the power that Satan had over us. So He left heaven and came down for us, because of His incredible love for us.

2. The incredible sacrifice that He made for you and me when He came down to earth.

Why did He come down for us? Hebrews says, “..for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” Beloved, Jesus had such incredible love for you and for me that He couldn’t bear the thought that you and I would be estranged from Him, that we would never be able to spend our days with Him in beautiful fellowship with the Triune God. And so, He came and He took care of the penalty of death. He sacrificed Himself. He gave Himself as a willing lamb to the slaughter for you and for me. And so, we remember His incredible wonderful sacrifice.

3. We must also remember His teaching.

As we look at the gospels, both the synoptic and the gospel of John, we find that right through, there’s such great profundity in the things that Jesus shared with the people of His day and age. His teachings astounded people, and yet, it was spoken with such simplicity that poor people, ones who were not intellectual by any stretch of imagination, could follow and grasp and understand the things of the kingdom of heaven. In fact, they say that He taught as one having authority. Not only did He bring heaven to earth in the things that He spoke, but He spoke as one with great authority. So you and I must also pay attention to His teachings. We must remember the things that He spoke while He was here on earth, and we must then begin to live in the way that He has told us through the teachings, which leads me to the fourth point.

4. We must remember His walk on earth.

The way in which He carried Himself, the way in which He interacted with people, His demeanor, His attitude, His entire behavior, the way in which He was moved by compassion, the way in which He healed, the way in which He connected with the poor people. He couldn’t bear to see them all sitting and listening to Him, and then just send them away to fend for themselves, that He made it a point to make sure that they were fed. And we have those wonderful accounts, those narratives of His feeding of the five thousand, and then the four thousand. So, we must look at the way in which He walked on earth – that He didn’t compromise on anything while He was here. He spoke truth, never spoke a lie and lived a blemish-less life which is a model for us to follow.

WE REMEMBER THE COVENANT.

Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and His people.” What does that mean? It means that it replaces the old covenant. Why? Let me just give you a few reasons:

- a) While a High Priest regularly sacrificed animals for their sins, it didn’t ensure forgiveness. Hebrews 10:4 says, *“For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* Once a year they made atonement for their sins, but it did nothing for their consciences because that guilt still remained.
- b) It was unable to supply the power that people needed to fulfill and obey the law. The new covenant however, ensures that the Holy Spirit is within us and enables us to operate in this world with God-given power. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the bible tells us is in our hearts; your heart and mine, giving us the power that we need to tap into, to live the kind of lives that God wants us to live completely in keeping with His commandments.
- c) The old covenant wasn’t meant to last forever. We read in Hebrews 8:5 that everything Moses did in constructing the old covenant tabernacle together with its rituals and sacrifices was only “a copy and shadow of the heavenly thing.” When we talk about a copy and a

shadow, that means it is not the real thing, it is not something that is eternal; it is temporal or temporary.

That's why the new covenant is being ushered in by Jesus. What does that establish for us? The new covenant establishes:

- i. An internalizing of God's thoughts on our hearts and minds. Hebrews 8:10 says, "I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts." During the bible study that we've been doing on Colossians, we see Paul's prayer for the Colossians, and we said that we ought to start praying like this. He prays: "We had not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of His will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit."
Look at what he is praying for: that we will be able to have complete knowledge of God's will. That's what the new covenant gives us – through the Holy Spirit living in us, He leads us into all truth. He reminds us of the things that Jesus spoke and He shows us how and what we need to do to walk in a holy way. God says, "I will put My laws into your minds and write them on your hearts so that they are within you, so that you will know implicitly what you need to do and how you need to obey Me."
- ii. With the new covenant comes the promise of a personal relationship. Hebrews 8:10 again says, "*I will be their God and they shall be My people.*" I love that verse, and I think at some point, we had even printed on mugs the verse: "*See, I have carved you on the palms of My hands.*" We belong to Him. I am His and He is mine. We have a personal relationship with Him. That's why we call Him "Abba, Father." Our heavenly Father who art in heaven.
- iii. With the new covenant comes the promise of final forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 8:12 says, "*For I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more.*" Sam Storms, pastor from Bridgeway Church, says, "But under the old covenant, forgiveness was never final and forever. One had to return year after year on the day of Atonement so that the high priest could continually slaughter an animal and place the blood of the sacrifice on the altar in the Holy of Holies. For an Old Testament believer, it was wonderful to experience forgiveness for sins previously committed. But each person knew that with future sins there was a need for another, future sacrifice. The blood of bulls and goats could never perfectly purge their consciences. But in the new covenant, established by the shedding of Christ's blood, our sins are altogether and forever forgiven – past, present, future."

WE REMEMBER TO PROCLAIM HIS DEATH UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN.

"For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you are announcing the Lord's death until He comes again."

What do we have to remember about this? We need to remember that we are in the age and dispensation of grace; that grace is available to us, that during this time there is a Savior who waits with open arms to welcome a sinner home. Every time we partake of this meal of this bread and juice, we are reminded of a Savior who had incredible love for us that He gave His life so that we would not perish but have eternal life.

But also, to remember this: that while we have this time, we look at Jesus as Savior. But when He comes again, we will then encounter Him as Judge. The time of grace will be over. And therefore, we must proclaim what He has done for us.

Every time we look at the Lord's Supper, it must remind us of what Peter says in his letter. He says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has brought you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

So beloved, each time we come to the table, we must be reminded that we have a responsibility as ones who are disciples of Jesus to be able to then proclaim to others to get to know Him while He still opens His hands out as a Savior to them, with the ability to save them from sin.

As we come to the Table remembering those three things, we must also come with certain mindsets or requirements.

- We come to the table in celebration. Why? Because it is a defining moment in our lives. it reminds us of what God has done to us. Just as the children of Israel looked at the Passover meal and remembered that they were brought out of slavery, remembered that God brought them out and made them a nation, remembered that they were God's chosen people. So also, we too must remember that we are no longer slaves. Galatians 4:7 says, "*Now you are no longer a slave, but God's own child, and since you are His child, God has made you His heir.*" So we come to this table with great celebration that we are children of God – sons and daughters of the Most High God, princes and princesses of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.
- We must come in reverence. 1 Corinthians 11:27 says, "*Anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup to the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*" What does unworthily mean? It is crucial for us to understand as it has implications for us. Unworthily means to come complacently to the table, to come light-heartedly, giving no thought to that which these elements signify how important they are to us, that we just come flippantly to the Lord's table.

I.H. Marshall explains it like this. He says, "In some Christian circles today, the fear of partaking unworthily in the Supper leads to believers of otherwise excellent character, refraining from coming to the table of the Lord. when this happens, Paul's warning is being misunderstood. The Lord's Supper is the place where the forgiveness of sin is proclaimed and offered to all who would receive it. Paul's warning was not to those who were leading unworthy lives and longed for forgiveness, but to those who were making a mockery of that which should have been most sacred and solemn by their behavior at the meal."

So we must come to the Lord's Table fully understanding what this means to us. This symbolizes what Jesus did for me and how He brought me from death to life, how He brought me as a slave to being a child of God, how He brought me from eternal damnation to eternal life with Him. As I look at the bread and the juice, it reminds me of what an incredible loving deed He did, and I can never come flippantly to this table. So we come with great reverence and awe when we come to the table of the Lord.

- We must come introspectively. Verse 28 says, "*That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you're eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.*" So we should come looking at our lives. we are to test our motives, our attitudes as we approach the table to be certain that we are partaking of this memorial for the right reason

and with the right understanding of what the elements are. That is so important beloved, that we understand what the bread means, what the juice means. That is why we spend so much time during the confirmation to help young children, young adults who are coming in to be able to fully understand the Lord's table. So that when they partake, they are not doing it out of ignorance, but they are doing it fully aware of what the broken bread and the juice means to them and for us.

His Body:

Hebrews 9:3 *"By a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh."*

So as we look at the bread, it is His body that was broken for us on the cross at Calvary. The veil was torn in two, from top to bottom. What did it symbolize? It symbolized that there was complete access into the presence of God, that we could now come freely. That's why it says: Come boldly before the throne of mercy to receive grace. Come boldly!

His Blood:

Then the Blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

So beloved, the Body reminds us of the body that He gave for us, the debt that He paid the penalty for my sins and yours. Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death. When we take the bread, we remember that He paid with His life. When we look at the juice, we are reminded that there is forgiveness of sins. That's why we constantly bring up 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins then He is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* There is forgiveness of sins, beloved. So the Lord's Table is not a place to be shunned. It's a place of forgiveness and mercy, a place of rest that we can come to and enjoy being with Him and in Him.

Every time I read the account of when Jesus went to the Gadarenes, and He saw that man who was filled with so many demons that he would just harm himself; they couldn't shackle him down. When Jesus freed that man, the people of the Gadarenes came and begged Him to depart from them. May it never be, beloved. Jesus waits at this table and He says, "Come and be blessed. Come to the table. My body given for you, My blood shed for you." The death penalty that was ours, paid by Him and the forgiveness of sins. Whatever it is, beloved, that even now you may have committed, which is lurking at the back of your minds as you come to the table; know that when you ask for forgiveness, that He will forgive and cleanse.

I love these beautiful lines penned by Rick Steve:

Come to the table, table of mercy
Come to the place where mercy is found.
Jesus our Savior, granting us favor,
Saving completely by His Blood.

Come to the table, table of mercy,
Bread His body, wine His blood.
Given for cleansing, life never ending,
Joy everlasting in heaven above.

Come to the table, the bread and the wine
Life everlasting and love so divine.
Come to the table, come and be blest,
Table of mercy, table of rest.

Come to the table, table of mercy
Sing hallelujah, lift up His praise.
Love one another, sister and brother
Joined in one family, holy beloved.

Come to the table, the bread and the wine;
Love everlasting and love so divine.
Come to the table, come and be blest;
Table of mercy, table of rest.

Beautiful words. Mary McDonald put this to music and the choir is going to sing it for us right now. I'd like you to let the words flow over you, into you and just bathe you. Prepare your hearts that, as you come to this table of mercy and rest, you would be blest indeed.
