

THE LORD'S SUPPER - 1 Corinthians 11:23

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)*

Introduction:

Today we celebrate The Lord's Supper, or Communion. In so doing, we participate in an element of Christian worship, which has been observed since the founding of the Church soon after Christ's death. It is a time of worship, which has been ordained by Jesus Christ himself. He instituted his Table, he commanded us to celebrate the Supper, he gave us the example how to dispense this holy sacrament.

But if you were to attend all of the services in all of the churches in this area and witness the celebration of our Saviour's sacrifice, you would probably be surprised at the variety of practices, beliefs, and names associated with the service. You may attend one church where people gather in an informal meeting and practice earnest and sincere prayers and self-examination before they ate of the bread and drank of the cup. They may use a single loaf and single cup, or they may use small pieces of bread and small individual cups. The people may come forward to an altar where they receive the bread and the cup, or they may have it brought to them in the seats.

You may attend another church where you would witness a priest with attendants dressed in colourful vestments. The priest alone would drink from the chalice and the people would receive only the wafers. After the priest utters the words of consecration, "This is my body", "hoc est corpus meum" in Latin, the elements are believed to actually become the flesh and blood of Jesus.

No doubt you would find many other practices as well. And you would also find many names by which these services are called. Some Christians with a Latin background may call it the "mass." This is taken from the words of dismissal (missa = mass), which are used by the priest. You may also hear it referred to as a "sacrament," which comes from sacramentum, a Latin word meaning "pledge of allegiance" which itself is a translation of the Greek word mysterion or mystery. Some refer to it as the Eucharist, from the Greek eucharistia, which means thanksgiving. Others refer to it as Communion, from the Greek koinonia, which means fellowship or communion. Congregations influenced by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century usually call the service the Lord's Supper, or Lord's Table.

As you can see, practices and beliefs vary. Some attach an almost magical significance to the Lord's Table. There are those who believe it is in itself imparting grace. To them, it is essential in order to receive salvation. On the other hand, there are others who ascribe almost no significance to this memorial meal. ***While they reject the positions of those churches which make the meal more than it is, they, in doing so to such an extreme, make it less than it is.***

From the Bible, we understand that the Lord's Table is neither a magical rite which itself imparts grace, nor is it simply a nice ceremony filled with nostalgic memories. It is a pronouncement of the church of the Lord, which can bring us into the presence of God, deal with our sin, restore fellowship with God and one another, give testimony of the significance of Christ's sacrificial death, personally assure us of our salvation and point to the second coming of our Lord.

We believe that the Lord is present at this meal in a most special way. While the elements are symbols, they are symbols of the opportunity to partake of the Lord himself. When Jesus said that we were to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, he meant that we could by faith have a real and living fellowship with him. And while we do not believe that the physical eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in itself imparts grace, we do believe that the act of partaking in faith, does impart the blessings of grace. So as you prepare to celebrate the Lord's Supper today, ask God to give you a fresh appreciation for this time of worship and a fresh awareness of his presence in our midst and the faith to accept the assurances given to us by a living Lord.

Christ's Body Broken

In this memorial meal, we partake first of the bread. The bread is a token or sign of Christ's body broken for us. The bread speaks to us both of Christ's suffering and his sufficiency. He is both the Saviour who suffered for us and who himself is sufficient to meet our every need. When you reflect on the bread, remember also Christ's suffering. The Lord's Table speaks to us of the death of Christ. It was a painful death. It was a death full of the suffering which paid for our sins.

What does that suffering reveal? For one thing, it reveals the gravity of sin. Just how serious does God consider sin, if Jesus had to die for God to forgive sin? The fact that Jesus had to die for our sins to be forgiven, indicates that God hates sin. Our God is a holy God. He is too pure to condone sin. But more than that, sin is a moral predicament which nothing less than the suffering of Christ could cure. The sacrifice of Christ speaks clearly of the gravity of our sin.

But the suffering of Christ also reveals the love of God. We are all familiar with the passage in John 3:16 which reads, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." It was because of the love of God that Jesus suffered and died on the Cross. This is why he came. This is why he died. Charles Wesley expressed it in this way:

*Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?*

We sing of amazing grace, but we should also sing of amazing love! When Jesus died on that cross, it was the greatest expression of God's love that could ever be given.

His suffering also reveals the provision of God. It reveals that Christ's death is sufficient for our every need. Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?" The God who gave Jesus for us will not withhold anything that we need.

Because Christ's body was broken for us, we can now experience the provision of God. Our needs can be met through the Lord Jesus. So, today as you partake of this broken bread, understand that it proclaims both the suffering and the sufficiency of Christ. Do you need more than you can provide for yourself? Jesus is what you need. He called himself "the Bread of Life." He is the Living Bread which meets the deepest needs of our spiritual hunger. Feed upon him. In complete surrender to him, partake of this bread, and through faith receive the Living Bread.

Christ's Blood Poured Out

The second element of the Lord's Table is the cup. The cup is filled with the fruit of the vine, which is a sign or token of the blood of Christ. Blood itself is symbolic of life. So when we speak of Christ's blood poured out, we are speaking of his life being poured out. And when his life was poured out, it was poured out as a payment for our sins.

Jesus is the Lamb of God! It was at the celebration of the feast of Passover when Jesus instituted this Lord's Table. The Passover feast commemorated the time when God spared Israel from the angel of death during their captivity in Egypt. A lamb was slain and the blood was placed on the doorposts and lintel of each house. When the angel of death saw the blood, he passed over each house.

Jesus is called "Our Passover" in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Christ, the Lamb of God, has been sacrificed as our Passover. His blood was shed for us and God's judgement for sins will "pass over us". It therefore speaks of the forgiveness of sins. Because of his shed blood, God can now fully and freely forgive us. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, "you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

Christ's blood poured out speaks also of a New Covenant of grace. To be saved under the Old Covenant, you had to keep the law perfectly. But that was our problem; we could not keep the law. Now, under this New Covenant of grace, our salvation does not depend upon our works. Our salvation depends upon Another's work. It depends upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. He did what we could not do. He died so that we could receive life. Now we can enter into a New Covenant with God, based not upon our own works, but based upon his grace offered to us because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

The Supper of our Lord therefore is also more than a sign or token of God's grace, but it seals to us, gives us a firm assurance of the certainty of our salvation. In the sacrament God speaks to us individually, affirming his love and our salvation, sealing his new covenant of grace with me personally, by inviting me to share in his bread and his cup.

While we should be aware not to make the meal more than it is, more than the Bible says it is, we should also remember never to make it less than it is. It is a sign and seal of our salvation!

In closing:

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Lord's Table is not only about looking back; it is also about looking ahead. It is not only a blessed assurance that we are redeemed, but also a firm promise that Jesus will return. The same Lord who died to save us, is coming again to receive us to himself. The same Lord that receives us at his Table to assure us of his amazing grace and love, will one day receive us at the heavenly banquet, the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Until he comes, let's commit ourselves to live for him.

This is the Word of God.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen

For any comments or questions regarding this sermon outline, please email Andries Combrink at andries@centurionwest.co.za