

Sermon Series on the Lord's Supper

Topic 1: What is the Lord's Supper? Matthew 26

October 7, 2018

There is a popular movie from the 1980's - called "The Gods Must Be Crazy." In this movie, a plane is shown at the beginning flying over a country of uncivilized people. While this plane is flying, a man finishes his bottle of Coke and throws it out of his window. The next scene shows a typical African man, working in his crude animal skins. While he is living his own life, suddenly a coke bottle comes flying out of the "sky" - from the "gods" - and into this man's life. But what is it? He doesn't know! He shows it to his friends - and there the story goes. Everyone tries to figure out WHAT the coke bottle is and how it should be used.

It must seem strange to visitors to see us kneeling to receive a paltry meal of wine and bread. What is it for? Even the Christian community is divided in some ways. "Is it merely a memorial meal that we take, like tipping a glass of wine in memory to someone? It is like eating a potluck? Or is it something more sacred? Do we eat it? Do we worship it? What do we do? "What does it matter?"

Common reason - every day experience - shows that when you go to a meal at someone's house or at a restaurant - you examine the restaurant BEFORE you eat there even. If there were mice running on the floor, workers sneezing on the food, and flies flying all over the place, you would think twice about going in and EATING their food. When you look at the menu - you don't just say, "bring me whatever you want to eat." When you have food allergies you have to be careful what you eat.

Would not the same approach be appropriate for the Supper which our Lord invites us to? Consider what could happen if you don't KNOW what is going on. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul - by inspiration of the Holy Spirit - warns - **anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself**. If you don't recognize - understand - what is happening in the Lord's Supper - you could end up eating judgment on yourself! Instead of helping your faith - it could hurt you! It would be foolish then, for us to treat the Lord's Supper like any other meal! In fact, that was the whole problem with the Corinthians. They were coming together - eating and drinking - some were eating too much. Some were drinking too much and getting drunk, while others weren't getting anything. It turned into a big social gathering, and nothing more. So Paul told them that they were sinning in the way they were doing it and God was judging them with sickness and death because of it.

Does not faith itself demand some sort of knowledge - some Word of assurance to rest on? We don't just believe what we want to believe. Romans 10:17 says, "**faith comes from hearing the message**." We believe in what God specifically tells us - in His promises. How can we find comfort from something that we know nothing about and are afraid to speak about? Is it important to talk about what the Lord's Supper is? Paul asks - **how can they believe if they have not yet heard?** You bet! So it is a good thing to review what communion is about - so we can appreciate what it is - and appreciate the practice of the Lord's Supper that we have. Today we start with the very basics, like when a coach comes out at the first practice and declares, "This is a ball." You start with the basics.

What is the Lord's Supper?

I. Go back to the Word

Let's go back to the Teacher, and seek knowledge from Him. When Jesus taught his disciples - there was one thing he always made sure of - that they UNDERSTOOD what he was saying. Take for instance Matthew 16,

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ⁷They discussed this among themselves and said, **“It is because we didn't bring any bread.”** ⁸Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, **“You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? . . .** ¹¹How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? **But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** ¹²Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Would it be plausible then, that this Master Teacher would leave us a teaching and practice during His last night that would be vague and open to individual interpretation- to multiple different meanings? Ask the lawyers of today - when it comes to writing a will - it has to be very specific and very plain. Even if there are any ambiguities or questions as to the will of the testator - the rule of law demands that the most basic sense be understood. You need to be as clear as possible. Therefore, simple logic and experience would tell us that we had best take Jesus last words very seriously. It would be best to take them at face value.

The Holy Spirit felt that this was such an important doctrine for us to have - that he included it FOUR TIMES in the Scriptures - in Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians. Matthew and Mark are repeated word for word, and Luke and 1 Corinthians are very similar to each other as well. So we will look at each pair of them together. Matthew 26 says:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” ²⁷Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, **“Drink from it, all of you.”** ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”

This was on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened bread. They had joined together in an upper room in Jerusalem - to celebrate the Passover - on the night that Jesus was betrayed. Jesus took the bread - unleavened - because it was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, broke it - and told the disciples - **“take and eat, this is my body.”** Then he took the cup and said, **“drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant.”** The exact same words are used in Mark. It's pretty simple and straightforward. We receive unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, (which would have been wine due to the time of the year and the fact that they had no refrigerators), the body of the Lord, and the blood of the Lord.

Now, if Jesus did not want this to be the basic understanding, what would he have done? Clarified it - right? But what happens? The book of Luke, which is written much later, says the same thing. And years later - Jesus personally visited Paul - and instructed him one on one. What does Paul say that Jesus taught him?

I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Elsewhere Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:16

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

Instead of saying, “no - don’t go with the basic meaning,” Jesus made it clear - in every reference to the Lord’s Supper - that there were four elements present. Bread, wine, body and blood. What kind of a teacher would he be, who, if trying to teach us something, would speak symbolically in everything he said? Why - you couldn’t understand a word he was saying if he never explained.

II. Take the Word at face value

So why are there so many different doctrines and practices on the Lord’s Supper? The Catholics teach that the bread and the wine are completely annihilated. There is nothing left but body and blood after the blessing of the priest. And for this reason they will genuflect when entering a church - basically worshiping the body and blood that they believe to be up on the altar. There are some that believe that by praying in the presence of the host and guarding the host they will receive special blessings from the Lord. But none of this is found in the Word.

The Baptists teach that there is only bread and wine. That the bread only “represents” the body. They say, “Jesus often spoke in parables.” He compared himself to a vine and branches. Or they argue, “Jesus body is finite - it’s in heaven - how could it be at hundreds of places at once?” “Your teaching makes Christians a bunch of cannibals who chew on Christ like a hamburger.”

How do we know who’s right? We need to go back to the Word - and not just any Word - but the specific words that directly address the institution of the Lord’s Supper. What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 11? Whenever you eat this - “**bread**”. If you eat it, it still must be present in the Lord’s Supper. What did Jesus say, “this represents my body,” or “**this IS my body?**” What did Jesus say the bread is? A participation - a communion in the body of Christ. The Word is plain. The problem isn’t with the Word of God. It’s with the eyes of man.

The story is told of Abraham - the father of faith. When God told Abraham that he was going to have a son in his old age - how did Abraham react? Genesis 15 says, “**You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.**” But how did God respond? ⁴ **Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your**

own body will be your heir.” God was saying, “No, Abraham, listen to me. This son will come from YOUR body.” Later on, Sarah also believed that this was impossible - because she was too old – over 70 years old. So she said to Abraham in Genesis 16:2, **Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.”** We all know what happened from that debacle with Ishmael. Now we’ve got a whole nation of Muslims to deal with over that one. But God wasn’t done yet. He again appeared to Abraham in Genesis 17 and reiterated the promise and specifically told him that it would be through Sarah. How did Abraham respond? **Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”** ¹⁸ **And Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”** ¹⁹ **Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac.** Not only did God do this one more time - but TWO more times. God personally appeared to Abraham to reassure him that he was being LITERAL - he and Sarah would ACTUALLY have a son! Finally, after he had one - when God told Abraham to KILL Isaac - how then did the father of faith respond? He took God LITERALLY.

What’s my point? Unless God says otherwise, we NEED to take him at his word. If God says that his body and blood are present in the Lord’s Supper - who are we to say that it is not? Why couldn’t this occur? Time and again in Scriptures God existed in a special way in physical manifestations. When he appeared before the Israelites - he did so in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Was it a literal pillar of fire? Yes. Was God within that pillar in a special way? Yes. When the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove - was a dove present? Yes. Was the Holy Spirit within the feathers of that dove? Yes.

Again, we need to look at the passages that DIRECTLY address the Lord’s Supper. Just because Christ said, **“you will not always have Me with you,”** it didn’t mean that Jesus would be locked up in heaven. He simply meant that He would not walk and talk with them on earth as He did in His humble way of living on earth in order to die for our sins. After all, He still appeared to them after His resurrection. Jesus, who rose from the dead, was able to appear in the middle of a locked room with His body and blood. He was able to walk with the disciples on the way to Emmaus with His physical body and then disappear immediately. It is this powerful God and man who said, **“this is my body.”** Jesus doesn’t leave it in our hands to debate over what our definition of “is” is. He is God, He can show up wherever and however He pleases. He is omnipresent! If Jesus were speaking in parables - he would have later explained himself. No such explanation is ever given. Therefore, we must take him literally.

III. What does it matter?

When you preach on a doctrine - you run the risk of people feeling detached from the subject. “Doctrine is dry,” many say. But you need to remember that DOCTRINE DICTATES PRACTICE. If you approach the topic of today’s service with “who cares,” consider what is happening in today’s church because of the teachings on the Lord’s Supper. Most churches in the world will allow anyone and everyone to show up and eat the Lord’s Supper with them - Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic,

etc. That is a known fact. In the town that I first served at the Methodist church allowed their youths to give Doritos and Pepsi for their “Lord’s Supper.” Recognize the danger they are in. Paul says, **anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.**

Maybe we are falling into the same temptation as the world. There used to be a time within our church body that we were required to announce personally to the pastor prior to communion. The week before communion - a member of the family was required to visit with the pastor and announce his attention to take the Lord’s Supper. The desire was for people to take the Lord’s Supper seriously and to spiritually prepare themselves for the Supper. The reverence for what is taking place is becoming less and less.

Not only is this so. It seems that in a general sense we are apologetic over the fact that we do not have open communion - where anyone and everyone can come up to take the Lord’s Supper. If we truly believe that closed communion is God pleasing, why do we apologize about it? Why should we be embarrassed over it?

Think about the wonder of having something authentic. When you have an actual jersey worn by someone or the actual ball that was hit at a game, it is authentic. You treat it special. You don’t just wear it around the house or let your kids play with it. So is this an authentic meal, an actual meal, where Jesus gives us the very things that He used to pay for our sins, His own body and blood, somehow hidden in, with, and under the bread and wine. This is something special! It’s nothing like eating the meat of a dead animal on a bun. This is the body and blood of our living God who took on this flesh to live and die for us.

How goofy the movie was that had the people in the African tribe trying to figure out what the Coke bottle was used for. It was funny to watch when you know what a Coke bottle is for. The Lord’s Supper is not meant to be a comedy of errors in trying to figure it out, not when the Word of God is so plain and straightforward.

When you take the Lord’s Supper today, remember what a great and humble experience this is! You will not only be tasting wine and eating bread, but the Lord’s true body and blood will be entering your body! As Isaiah cried out, you may say, **“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips!”** But what did God do for Isaiah? **One of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”** None of us are worthy to have the holy body and blood of the Lord enter our lips. We don’t feel worthy of such a thing! But it’s that very body that Jesus used to atone our lips. It’s that very blood that washes our sins away. He gives it to us to cleanse not only our lips, but our very souls. Remember not only what it is, but also what it is for. We’ll talk more about that soon. God bless you with a greater appreciation of what a sacred Supper this is. The body and blood of the Lord, in, with, and under the bread and wine, given for you for the forgiveness of sins. Amen.