

Some of the most dangerous things in life are things that don't look dangerous. Take for instance a cigarette lighter. When my brother was young, he was enamored by the orange glow that it would make when it was pushed in. So one day, while my parents weren't looking, he pushed in a cigarette lighter and stuck his finger into that orange glow. Then all of the sudden he realized there was more to that light than just looks. An outlet in a wall doesn't look dangerous. But that doesn't mean it's not.

God works the same way. I find it very interesting when I read stories in the Bible where God used very normal and innocent things to portray his power. Elijah had just sent news to king Ahaziah that he was going to die from a fall he had. In response, Ahaziah sent a company of fifty men to go and capture Elijah. Here he was, a little old man sitting on top of the hill. You would think that fifty men would have no problem capturing him. But what happened? Elijah said, **“if I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you.”** Through this little old man, God put to death 100 men in the blink of an eye.

There are many examples of God doing this in the Scriptures. And the Lord's Supper is one of them. God's word claims that the Lord Supper has amazing power. It says that by eating the body and blood of the Lord our sins are washed away, and therefore we are assured of eternal life. Today we are going to look at where that power comes from.

Where Does the Lord's Supper Get Its Power?

I. The Command

As you may well know, there are many so-called Christians and Biblical scholars who scoff at us for this teaching. “How can you trust in a piece of bread for your salvation?”, they ask. “As if all of our salvation relied on what we eat and drink. That's nothing but superstition and idolatry.” They think it is ridiculous that we treat the Lord's Supper like a powerful loaded weapon ready to explode. To them, thoughts like that belong in the dark ages.

I wonder how such scholars would have survived in the Old Testament. I could imagine them sitting beyond the encampment of the Israelites and laughing at the way they treated the Ark of the Covenant. “Look at the way they carry that little box around. They really believe that a god dwells within there!” Or imagine them even living in the New Testament. Acts 19 says, **“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.”** Doesn't that seem superstitious as well? “Holy healing handkerchiefs? “Who ever heard of such nonsense!”

We can't really blame them for such skepticism. When you hear about miracle healings today aren't you also skeptical? When you see people handling poisonous snakes you can't help but think they are ignorant. So also, when we claim that eating the Lord's Supper can forgive our sins and assure us of eternal life, people also think we are ignorant. So where do we draw the line between superstition, ignorance, and faith? That's the question isn't it? How do we know we are not being superstitious or ignorant by believing that the Lord's Supper has such power?

Consider what Paul said about his fellow Jews. They were traveling all across the countryside, doing their best to make Jews of all people. But what did Paul say of them? I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. As energetic as they were, their zeal was not based

on knowledge. They didn't know the Scriptures. They were only acting that way because that's the way they were taught to act. They were being ignorantly misled.

First of all, we know we're not being ignorant because we have a direct command from God to "**do this.**" Jesus very clearly said to "do" what he was doing. And what was he doing? Paul explains. "**The Lord Jesus, on the night 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.'**" 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.**" He was taking bread and wine, blessing it, and distributing it for the disciples to eat and drink. This was not just an example, this was a command for us to keep on doing. God doesn't command us to heal people with handkerchiefs, so we don't do that.

That is one reason why we believe the Lord's Supper is so powerful. When you are in an army and the five-star general tells you to do something, you have the power of the five-star general behind you. If he told you to go to your fellow soldier and stick your finger in his ear, you wouldn't think twice about it. You would confidently walk up to him and stick your finger in his ear. If someone asked you what you were doing, you would show him the command. It doesn't matter to you how ridiculous the command may be, you do it.

Think of this spiritually now. The world may think we are naive to come together, bless some bread and wine, and eat of the Lord's Supper and think something special is happening. It would be easy for us to question whether it really did any good to take the Lord's Supper if we didn't have God's Word on it. But we aren't being naive, because Jesus very clearly tells us that he wants us to do this. And if the Lord commands us to do this, it must be important to do.

II. The promise

You might remember the story of the seven sons of Sceva. When they heard that Paul was able to chase out demons left and right, they said "that looks pretty neat. We should try it." But when they tried to do so, one demon beat the tar out of them, and they ended up running from the house bloody and naked. When the children of Israel under the guidance of Hophni and Phinehas tried to use the Ark of the Covenant in battle, they said, "**Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.**" And what happened? The Ark ended up getting captured and Hophni and Phinehas were both put to death.

Here you have two examples of what the difference is between work righteousness, superstition, and faith. These examples show people who thought that by just performing an act that God commanded they would have success. You might compare it to someone who goes to church and takes the Lord's Supper thinking that just because I'm doing what God told me to do I will be blessed. They look at what they do as a work they perform. "I put in my time. I do what the church tells me to do." But that doesn't mean they are blessed. Consider the Jews of Jesus' time. What did Jesus say of them? "**These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.**" He condemned their worship because their hearts weren't in it. If we only take the Lord's Supper because we're commanded to, then we should be condemned also. That would be the same as wearing a cross around your neck and assuming you won't get in an accident because of it. That's superstition.

Why did the people of Israel put such trust in the Ark of the Covenant? Because God promised them that he would be specially present between the angels on the Ark. It wasn't trust in the Ark. It was trust in the promise. When they ended up trusting in the Ark instead of the Lord's promise to be with the Ark, the Ark was

useless. Or take for instance the story of Naaman. When he was sick with leprosy he went to Elisha. He expected something really flashy to happen. But when Elisha just told him to go and wash himself in the Jordan River seven times, he thought it was ridiculous - because he was looking at the water - not the promise. But when his servant pointed him to the promise, and he followed through relying on the PROMISE of good health, he realized that the command of the Lord was not so stupid.

The power of the Lord's Supper isn't just in the eating and drinking or following Jesus' command. It's more than just blindly believing that if I eat and drink this I'll be saved. What did Jesus say? **This is my body and blood which is GIVEN FOR YOU FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. He said to DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.** There is a promise here connected to what Jesus did on the cross with His body and blood. There is instruction used, and memory too. When we remember that our sins are paid for through Jesus body and blood, we are spiritually brought out of the sorrow of despair and lifted up to the happiness of God's grace. When He applies what He used for our salvation to us, then we receive it in faith. It's that promise of forgiveness that gives us life. It's not that we're trusting in the Lord's Supper to save us, we're trusting in the promise that Jesus died for us and we are forgiven - which we are assured of and given in the Lord's Supper - to save us. Through the Supper we are being pointed directly to Jesus and we are being given Jesus. That's where the power comes from - the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Luther said, "All blessings come from the merit of Christ." The fathers have said that all Sacraments have flowed from the side of Christ; the blood of Christ flows into Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

III. Faith

Our Old Testament lesson for today showed the Israelites in a tough situation. They were complaining in the desert about their lack of food and drink, and God became angry with them. So he sent poisonous snakes to bite them. And what was his remedy? He told Moses to make a bronze snake, put it on a pole, and have people look at it. The people would be healed by just having Moses put the bronze snake on the pole. If they didn't believe it, they wouldn't be healed. They would have to look at it in faith. This is also true of the Lord's Supper - you need to eat and drink it with faith in its power - in order to receive its power. You see, our God has never been one who just wanted us to do things for the sake of doing it. He has always wanted to involve our souls in the process. Luther said,

"The Sacrament is a ford for us, a bridge, a door, a ship, in which and by which we pass from this world into eternal life. Therefore everything depends on faith. He who does not believe is like one who must cross the sea but is so timid that he does not trust the ship. Therefore he must remain behind and can never be saved; for he will not embark to cross over. This reluctance is caused by man's dependence on the senses and by an untried faith, which finds the passage to cross the Jordan of death hard work. Moreover, the devil also fiercely helps to make it so.

As Elisha laid sick and dying on his deathbed, Jehoash the king came to him one last time. Elisha decided to predict the future for him. First of all, Elisha told him to take an arrow and shoot it out the window. After the king did so, Elisha told him, "**The LORD's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!**" Next, he told him to take some arrows and strike the ground with them. Now you could imagine and that this king wasn't used to doing such simple little games. So it appears that Jehoash half heartedly took the arrows and struck the ground three times. And what was the result? Elisha became angry with them, and told him he would only defeat the enemy three times. He should have struck the ground five or six times and had complete

victory. But he didn't want to go through the charades. He missed his chance at power.

Do you find yourself losing the battles of life? Are you having a hard time controlling your temper? Do you having difficulty dealing with your spouse? Or children? When you feel like you are losing the spiritual battle, or not doing as good as you think you could, do you ever say to yourself, "I could really use the Lord's Supper?" How often do you instead say, "I could really use a drink. I could really use a vacation. I just need some quiet time." How often do you go shopping to try and make yourself feel better – by yourself something new? Put on a new dress or a new shirt, and that will get you by for another week. And then, after our vacation or our drink, or our quiet time, we try to convince ourselves that we are completely refreshed and ready to attack life again. Our Lord's Supper is the wine without the blood, the bread without the body, self esteem instead of self-righteousness.

When I was in college, sometimes I would do some stupid things. And when you did stupid things, it meant that you had to go to the Dean's office. It I can recall sitting in front of his desk as he would make me see the error of my ways. Inevitably, he would always ask the question, "When have you had communion last?" You see, Dean saw an intimate connection between the Lord's Supper and the way we behaved. It was a good connection to make. He really had it right, didn't he?

Do you have it right? Do you believe that the Lord's Supper has such power? Like King Jehoshaphat, do you come to it and half heartedly take it? Or do you wholeheartedly believe that your sins really are forgiven as you take of it? Do you believe that as you eat and drink of it your faith could be strengthened? That you could be given strength to lead a better life and gain better control of your emotions and pet sins? If you struggle with that - take it again. Take it again. And take it again. Think about what is in the Lord's Supper. The promise of Jesus that your sins are paid for. The promise that he died FOR YOU. As your faith eats of Christ, and your mouth swallows him, you will grow in your faith.

In the story of the Lion King, two little animals, a warthog and a meerkat come upon a lion in the desert. What ensues is an argument between the two - what should they do with this potentially powerful creature? At first the meerkat wanted to run away - fearing for his life. But then, the warthog asked, "what if he's on our side! Then he could protect them!" So they decided to use the lion for their advantage.

The Lord's Supper is a very powerful spiritual weapon of God that he uses to fight the devil and crush our sinful nature. As Christians, we don't need to be afraid of its power. Instead, we can respect that power, trust in that power and use it. The power of the Lord's Supper can benefit us greatly. It has the power of God's Word - to connect us to Christ, strengthen our faith in him, fight the devil, and end up in heaven. Either you can use it or avoid it. Why not use it today? Amen.