

MATTHEW 26:26-29

DINING WITH JESUS

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”¹

The grave danger of familiar traditions is that they will become routine; and thus, the power of the symbol is diluted, if not destroyed. The Lord’s Supper is the continuing ordinance given to believers by our Saviour. Those who have received Christ as Master of life are called to identify with Him immediately through the ordinance of baptism. Only then, having identified with Him openly, those believers, gathered as members of a particular congregation, are instructed to actively call to mind His sacrifice and His promise through sharing in the tradition that we have received and know as Communion, or the Lord’s Table.

The Lord’s Supper is given to believers to remind them of Christ’s love revealed through His sacrifice, to encourage them to strengthen fellowship within the Body to which He has appointed them, and to encourage them in the hope that arises from His promise to return. And though it is important that we remind ourselves frequently of what we declare, perhaps we need to shake off our lethargy from time-to-time and refresh our minds.

THE SETTING FOR THE MEAL — Sitting in a modern church building, it is doubtful that contemporary Christians capture the intimacy associated with the meal described in the Gospels. We sit together in pews, or on seats, while first one and then the other of the elements are passed down the rows. We sit obediently, waiting for the pronouncement of the formula that permits us to eat or drink. Then, in unison, we chew the bread or hurriedly swallow the juice. Just because we have eaten bread and drunken juice at the same time does not mean that we have experienced fellowship, nor even that we have worshipped.

What is done in such a setting is often not fellowship, but rather individual worship. Don’t misunderstand; I am not opposed to worship as an individual, but the Meal is meant to be **communion**—a sharing of lives. Indeed, the Meal is to be observed in a group setting and not as a solitary act for an individual, or even for individuals focused on their own actions. And the normal practise among contemporary Christians, however comfortable and regardless of how beautiful one believes the act to be, is not necessarily conducive to corporate worship.

Jesus was together with His disciples to observe the Passover Meal. All were present, save for Judas who had just hurried out. The Master had just finished washing the disciples’ feet, when he divulged that one of the disciples would betray Him. Their response was shock. John says that they “looked at one another, uncertain of whom He spoke” [JOHN 13:22]. Their silence was broken as the disciples, one after another, asked, “Is it I, Lord” [MATTHEW 26:22]? Jesus indicated that it was the one who had dipped his hand into the bitter herbs with Him. Judas, also, asked whether he was the one who would betray Jesus, and the Master’s answer was, “You have said so” [MATTHEW 26:25].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

It seems apparent that the other disciples did not understand the exchange, if they actually heard what was said. Likely, they were each speaking, questioning what had just been said. They were focused on their own thoughts, and so missed what was said. Peter, recovering a presence of mind to wonder what Jesus meant, motioned to John to ask Jesus who it was. John happened to be leaning back with his head near Jesus chest. So turning slightly, he asked, “Lord, who is it?” At this, Jesus responded, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” And with that, Jesus dipped the bread and handed it to Judas [JOHN 13:23-26].

Handing the bread to Judas, Jesus said, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” I can only wonder that John didn’t exclaim his surprise, or turn and blurt out this stunning knowledge before the others. Undoubtedly, Judas knew that he was exposed, and so he hurried out to betray the Master; and John sat there silent in the face of this stunning knowledge, perhaps unable to fathom what he had just witnessed. It was after Judas left, that the Master instituted the Meal with those who were truly His disciples.

Fix in your mind that Judas was not present when Jesus instituted the Communion Meal! Flying in the face of modern evangelical practise, this singular observation sets precedence for excluding those who are not committed to Christ from the Meal. Jesus had earlier identified Judas as “a devil” [JOHN 6:70]. This is a truth that is acknowledged but seldom enforced among contemporary evangelicals. There is a corollary to this truth, that those who are not committed to discipleship within the body of believers have no right to the Lord’s Table. By inviting Judas to leave, the Master demonstrated that unsaved individuals and those who have no relationship to the assembly have no claim on the fellowship that should be expressed.

The disciples who followed Jesus—those who were committed to Him, to His purpose and to His Kingdom—were reclining at the table with Him. The Passover observance was concluded; Judas had left the room. It was at this point, in the intimacy arising from the warm fellowship of the disciples, that Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them to eat. The significance of His action could not have been foreseen, but the intimacy of sharing His heart with His devoted followers is often missed in this day. The Lord’s Supper is meant to be a festive, joyful occasion. Too often we attempt to make it such a solemn event that we fail to realise the joy that attends being in the presence of the Risen Saviour and His redeemed people.

The Meal the Master instituted that night was not so much an act of worship as it was an expression of love. To fail to realise the intimacy of fellowship with the Master, and consequently the fellowship we enjoy with those who follow Him, is to miss an essential aspect of the act. If I sit in a service of Communion and claim to worship without knowing the intimacy of being a disciple of Him who is worshipped, and if I participate at the Lord’s Table but fail to share my life with those participating at that time, how can I say that I have recognised the presence of the Master or acknowledged His Body? I have performed a rite, participated in a ritual, but I have not truly received the blessing that God intended this action to be.

When I came to faith, it was in a congregation that practised strict adherence to the Word of God as an inerrant guide for faith and practise. They observed the Lord’s Table but once each year. Before the Table was set, the pastor would address the assembly, explaining the Scriptures and asking that all who were not members of the congregation to please excuse themselves as the Body would be observing the Communion Meal. In doing this, they were in line with the practise of the earliest churches. In an ancient work known as The Didache, we read, “Let no one eat or drink from your Eucharist except those who are baptised in the Lord’s Name; for the Lord also has spoken concerning this: Do not give what is holy to dogs” [THE DIDACHE: 9:5].²

² Jack N. Sparks (ed.), **The Didache**, in The Apostolic Fathers (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN 1980) 314

THE DOCTRINES PRESENTED BY THE MASTER — There is a joyous sense surrounding the Communion Meal. However, there are a number of vital doctrines taught by Jesus' words and by this ordinance that we need to acknowledge. There are at least five great doctrines suggested through a review of the text before us at this hour.³

First, note *the vicarious atonement* of Christ the Lord. This is a perfectly fine theological term that is easily forgotten in this day. All that is meant by this term is that Jesus, who needed no atonement or covering for sin, provided atonement for us. Christ the Lord became our substitute, taking our punishment on Himself so that we could live. He received the punishment we deserved; and now we can enjoy His life. The Saviour gave His life as a substitute because of our helpless condition. Jesus died in our place as our substitute; He took our guilt on himself and received the punishment for our sins in His own body. This is the import of Isaiah's words that were recorded hundreds of years before Jesus was born of a virgin.

“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

[ISAIAH 53:4-6]

Paul makes this identical point when in his letter to the Corinthian Christians he wrote, “For our sake [God] made [Christ Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:21]. The Passover, which was being observed that very week as the Master instituted this continuing ordinance, commanded the sacrifice of an innocent lamb for the sin of others. This is what is symbolised by the breaking of the bread—in the same way the bread was broken, so Jesus' body would be broken, but not for Himself. His body would be broken for those who would trust him as their Saviour.

It is impossible to read this account of the institution of the Lord's Supper without drawing the conclusion that the Meal emphasises *a new covenant*. MATTHEW 26:28 is the only verse containing the word “covenant” in this Gospel. It is an important use of the word and almost certainly a reference to EXODUS 24:8, where Moses is recorded as saying, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Since Exodus 24 records the establishment of the old covenant, we can hardly miss the contrast between that old covenant and the new covenant that is set in place by Jesus. Matthew and Mark do not use the word “new,” but Luke does. He records Jesus' words as the cup representing “the new covenant” in Christ's blood [LUKE 22:20].

³ The following points are suggested and discussed in James Montgomery Boice, **The Gospel of Matthew** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 2001) 561

Not surprisingly, Paul also preserves the word in his transcription of Jesus' words, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" [1 CORINTHIANS 11:25].

Jesus' testimony linking the old covenant and the new covenant makes clear that His death was the fulfillment and end of the millions of bloody sacrifices that had been used to seal and maintain the old covenant. There would be no more need for sacrifices once he had died for our sin. This is the emphasis found in the Letter to Hebrew Christians, where we read, "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

"Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant" [HEBREWS 9:11-15].

The author's conclusion is that "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" [HEBREWS 10:10].

Although Matthew did not preserve Jesus' use of the word "new," Jesus apparently said "new," which means that he was also presenting his death as a fulfillment of the promise recorded by Jeremiah. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" [JEREMIAH 31:31-34].

The old covenant was a gracious covenant, but the people had not been able to keep it. In the new covenant, God's people would be empowered to keep the law, which would be written on their hearts and minds. This is the covenant we have received and which is pictured in the Meal that is set before us as the Lord's Supper.

In the text, Jesus spoke of *the forgiveness of sins*. Speaking of the forgiveness of sins is another indication that Jesus was thinking of the promise of a new covenant in Jeremiah's writing as well as what Moses had expressed in Exodus 24. However, these words express an additional, vital point. To be forgiven by God is our great need, for it is only as our sins are forgiven and we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ that we can stand before a holy God. It is by the blood of Christ alone that we are cleansed from sin's defilement.

This truth is emphasised as the Apostle begins the letter we have received as Ephesians. "In [Christ Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" [EPHESIANS 1:7]. The Letter to the Hebrew Christians contains a marvellous statement in this context: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" [HEBREWS 9:22].

This truth is also summarised in Paul's Letter to the Church in Colossae. There, the Apostle has written, "[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" [COLOSSIANS 1:13, 14].

Whenever we participate in the Communion Meal, we should remember Christ's substitutionary atonement. When we were weak and had no ability to pay the debt of sin, He took our place. Make that knowledge personal. In your heart, say, "What I was weak and without ability to pay the debt of sin, He took my place." Each of us should recall that we have been placed under a new covenant unlike the old covenant, and that He has empowered us to fulfil the conditions of that new covenant. Certainly, each of us who are saved should rejoice in the knowledge that He has forgiven our sin. As His redeemed child, we who are saved now stand in the presence of God, clothed in the righteousness of the sinless Son of God.

There are yet two other doctrines that arise from the pericope under consideration today. The first of these is *particular redemption*. This doctrine of particular redemption is not spoken of much among the churches of our Lord in this day. As He looked forward to His passion, Jesus did not say that his blood would be poured out for everyone for the forgiveness of their sins. He said that His blood of the covenant was to be "poured out for many" [MATTHEW 26:28]. Jesus' blood was not poured out for Judas, because we know that he was not saved. This is evident from the reference to Judas in ACTS 1:25, which speaks of him going "to his own place" and from Jesus' assertion that he was a devil [JOHN 6:70]. Moreover, John informs us that Satan entered Judas after he was exposed by Jesus [see JOHN 13:27]. Though a Christian may be demon obsessed, he cannot be demon possessed unless the Holy Spirit can somehow be expelled from that believer's life. If Jesus had died for him, Judas would have been saved, since even the sin of his betrayal would have been cleansed by Christ's blood.

In the few words of our text, Jesus taught that his death was exclusively for His own people and that it was effective in saving them and only them from their sins. Jesus' blood made an actual atonement for transgressions. His sacrifice actually propitiated God on their behalf. His death secured their justification, and by his stripes they all were truly healed. This is a hard doctrine that is ignored too often today as people imagine that Jesus died for everyone. Indeed, Paul says that our God is "Saviour of all people," but this is qualified by the clause that follows, "especially of those who believe" [1 TIMOTHY 4:10]. This is not an excuse to reject the Saviour, but a warning not to presume a relationship if none exists.

None of us know who is saved and who is lost, and so we are responsible to "proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation" [MARK 16:14]. Those who believe will be saved; those who refuse to believe will be condemned. The unbelief despite the gracious message of life demonstrates that these never had life. The Spirit of God did not work in their heart and they were never saved. Truly, the message we offer is that "Whoever hears [Christ's] Word and believes Him who sent [the Saviour] has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life" [JOHN 5:24]. However, this wonderful announcement is tempered by the knowledge that "whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the Only Son of God" [JOHN 3:18].

Particular redemption means that Christ's sacrifice was not meant for all; but Jesus' words also teach that it was not merely for a few, but for many. This knowledge should encourage us to witness to as many as possible. Many have come. Many more are yet to come. There are many with whom we have yet to share the gospel. Let's get on with the work. Amen.

Christ's words also teach the comforting truth of *eternal security*. He stated as an unchallengeable fact that one day he would drink wine with His disciples ["with you," verse 29] in his Father's kingdom. How could Jesus be certain that this would happen? Obviously His certainly arose out of the knowledge that his death would accomplish salvation for those who believed, and the salvation He provided would be so complete and so perfect that not even Peter's public denial of the Lord would undermine it. This is a vital truth, for if you have eternal life, it cannot be probationary. If you're saved, it is an eternal salvation.

It is important that we take a little time to explore this issue of eternal security. I grew to manhood in the home of a deacon in a general Baptist church. My grandfather was a pioneer preacher in Kansas for those Armenian believers. They could not dare believe that anyone could rest secure in the knowledge of Christ's salvation. After I had come to faith as a young man, my dad was visiting our home on one occasion. As often happened in those days, our conversation turned to the Word of God. "Son," my dad said, "If I believed as you that you are forever saved, I'd go take my fill of sin."

"Dad," I responded, "I've had my fill of sin. I'm not looking for opportunity to sin; I'm seeking to honour the Saviour who loved me and gave Himself for me."

The salvation Christ gives is a forever proposition. Listen to some of the emphatic statements found in His Word. Speaking to a group that challenged Him, Jesus said on one occasion, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" [JOHN 10:27-30].

"I give them *eternal life*!" "They will *never perish*!" "*No one will snatch them* out of My hand!" I remember pointing out these words to my Dad, only to have him respond, "Yes, but you can remove yourself from His hand." How foolish! If you can do that, you are greater than Christ the Lord. In that case, your power to control your own life would be greater than His power to keep you. How foolish, I say.

When pushed, my dad was compelled to resort to the theoretical. When asked why he would ever wish to cease believing Christ the Lord, he acknowledged that he couldn't imagine doing so. Nevertheless, he argued, if he wanted to, he could quit believing. The point is that those who belong to Christ, those who are born from above, do not cease believing. Those who never knew Him may appear to walk away, but the very fact that they can leave the presence of the Saviour is evidence that they never knew Him.

John has written, "It is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" [1 JOHN 2:18, 19].

We speak of salvation as having been born from above. Those who are born from above and into the Family of God cannot be unborn. They are children of the heavenly Father. Here is the tragedy! Too many professed Christians are depending on their profession rather than depending on Him who saves. That is, they have faith in their faith, contending that because they have said they love God, or because they say they have confessed Christ, they are saved. However, it is by grace we are saved through faith; and this is not our own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Here is where the rub comes in. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should talk in them" [see EPHESIANS 2:8-10].

I am comforted by the knowledge that the salvation we have received from the Saviour is unending. Saved, we will never be lost. I am certain that “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” [PHILIPPIANS 1:6]. Again, John testifies, “This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

“I write these things to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:11-13].

How rich are the truths taught at the Lord’s Table. There is great comfort for each Christians as he or she meditates on the Meal. It is enough for many that we recall the love of the Saviour, as we refresh our appreciation of the fellowship of believers, and as we renew our hope in the promise of His coming. But, as we have seen in this study today, we are reminded of the vicarious atonement provided by the Master; and in His suffering, we are delivered from judgement. We are reminded that we live under a new covenant—one which is the result of grace and not through the efforts we may expend. We have seen how the Meal reminds us of the forgiveness of sin, and so we rejoice in this freedom. However, for myself, it is the knowledge that God loved me and gave Himself for me—the particular redemption and eternal security that gives me the greatest comfort as I review the institution of the Meal.

THE HOPE PROMISED WITHIN THE CUP — As He passed the cup around to the disciples, Jesus said one final thing that is a source of great joy. He said, “I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom” [MATTHEW 26:29]. Because He used the preposition “until,” Jesus has provided rich hope to those who follow Him. That little word transforms all that He said into a statement of hope for the thoughtful child of God, for there awaits a day when Christ the Lord will dine with all the redeemed people of God.

We live in a world characterised by uncertainty. Fortunes are wiped out overnight, it seems. Families are stressed to the point of disintegration. Familiar institutions appear to be crumbling as moral decay and ethical rot spread throughout the population. Anyone who reviews contemporary government cannot help but wonder what the future holds for our province and for our nation. If you watch the nightly news or listen to the synopsis provided on radio, it is easy to despair. Under such conditions, the child of God needs a firm rock on which to plant his feet; and the words of the Saviour provide that solid foundation.

Just as Lot was “greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked... Tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard” [2 PETER 2:7, 8], so the child of God today is grieved for righteousness sake by the acts of the wicked performed in the name of tolerance, or progress, or equality. In such a world, it is distressingly easy to lose hope. Yet, when we come to the Lord’s Table and hear the familiar promise Jesus made, we are encouraged. Perhaps next time we will be seated by the Lord’s Table and He will serve us this Meal.

We have forgotten that we are destined for something better than what is now. Like Peter walking on the waves, we become obsessed with the danger about us and the turmoil that marks this present world. Thus focused on what is, we forget what shall be. Too often we have become so consumed with the present that we neglect what is coming. And we are destined for a change. Recall the promise we have received through the Apostle of Love. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” [1 JOHN 3:1, 2].

Refresh in your mind the promise of what is waiting the momentary appearance of the Master. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18].

We need to encourage ourselves in the promise of the Master. “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” [JOHN 14:2, 3]. This is the clear implication provided in the observance of the Communion Meal.

I pray that God encourages you. I pray that you refresh your heart through participating in this Meal. I pray even more earnestly that you are a child of the Living God. Far too many people have permitted themselves to become religious without a relationship. Going through the formalities of religion, they long for peace and for hope, only to grow ever more frustrated. I hope that does not describe you. However, if it does describe you, you can change your condition now by looking in faith to the Risen Saviour.

God’s Word promises, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For ‘Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

And that is our prayer for you. To believe the Master, to receive the salvation He offers, we invite you to receive the gracious offer of life in the Beloved Son. Why do you wait? Receive the forgiveness of sin and the life He promises. Do it today; do it now. Amen.