

THE SERMON IN THE SUPPER

"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."
I Corinthians 11:24-26.

The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance which is to be observed by and in His churches at stated intervals as determined by each individual church, inasmuch as the scriptures do not specify how often it is to be observed. This ordinance has a distinct meaning and message. The members of the church, which is observing the ordinance, partake of a bit of bread and a sip of the fruit of the vine in commemoration of the suffering and dying of Christ for them. This observance refreshes our memories with the love of Christ for us, and brings more vividly to our recollection His sacrificial work so that our love to Him is increased and strengthened thereby.

You have memorials of loved ones from whom you are separated, but the one you cherish most is the one that brings out his picture in his most loving mood. You cherish it because it is like him, and if someone should mutilate it you would be grieved. How sacred to us is the gift of a dying friend! We do not allow unthinking persons to remark about it, or the hands of the unsympathetic to handle it. As one dear to us, setting out on a long journey or passing forever from the earth, puts in our hands his portrait, or something he has used, and is pleased to think we shall treasure it for his sake; so did our Lord, on the eve of His departure, institute this ordinance in order that His disciples might have a memento of Him. He wanted to leave something with them that would be a reminder of their relation to Him.

And this memorial is unique. It is emphatic in recalling the death of Christ. Other men are remembered by their philosophies or by their disciples. Their birthdays and the anniversaries of their accession to power are celebrated, but in this instance the dying hour of One is commemorated. Only one explanation of this fact can be made. Other men accomplished what they did by their lives, whereas, Christ wrought His great work for mankind by His death. So, the prayerful observance of this ordinance in the Lord's house and in the spirit of the Lord will enrich our lives, cause us to love the Lord more, and bring us to a more loyal devotion to Christ and His church.

The Sermon in the Supper has been repeated time and again, but it still has a strong appeal to human hearts. This is true because it relates to and centers in Christ. The glorious gospel of God's grace in Christ can be proclaimed by public preaching, faithful teaching, sacred singing, printed pages, personal testimony and godly living. But, all of us cannot engage in all of these methods. In view of this fact, it is encouraging to learn that each of us can proclaim the gospel of Christ through the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper. As you observe this ordinance in this service you are helping to preach a sermon. You may not be able to stand in this pulpit and preach God's Word to others, but as you sit around the Lord's Table and partake of these emblems you are thereby declaring the love of God and proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Saviour of men. You are announcing that only the Christ, who gave His body to be broken and His blood to be shed, can save men. That is why you, as members of this church who have been saved by the Lord, should do you very best in the preaching of this sermon. By your observance of this ordinance you become a silent but an impressive preacher of Christ crucified. "Ye do shew the Lord's death," says our text. And "shew", as used here, literally means to preach." In the proclamation of this Sermon in the Supper we shall emphasize three truths.

I. The Christ of Yesterday.

In the days of His flesh our Lord Jesus not only gave gladly of His time and strength, but He poured out His very life's blood on the cross. His death is what is held up to view in this supper. It is not the Lord's life that is emphasized in this sermon, splendid as that was in its unsullied holiness. It is not His teaching that is celebrated, though the world has admitted that as a teacher Jesus Christ is without a peer. It was not His power to work miracles that Christ asked His friends and followers to remember, though He went through the world bestowing upon men gifts that could come only from a hand that was divine. It was His death that was to be proclaimed. The central thing in the Christian witness must always be the Lord's death for the New Testament makes more of His death than of anything else about Him. That Jesus died for us ought to be our first thought when we awake in the morning; it ought to be gratefully remembered as we fall asleep at night; it ought to give purity to our thoughts, quality to our words, and tone to our actions.

This Supper sets forth Christ's sacrificial and atoning death. Its bread speaks of His broken body: "This is My body which is broken for you." Its cup speaks of His shed blood: "This cup is the new testament in My blood." In both bread and cup the Lord's Table proclaims the Lord's death. As we take the bread it speaks of His body wounded and bruised, of the nails driven through His hands and feet, of the thorns which pierced His brow, of the spear that was thrust into His blessed side, and of the body taken from the cross and lovingly laid in Joseph's tomb. As we take the cup it speaks to us of the blood of Jesus, of that crimson tide which cleanses the guilty soul and makes it white as snow. The very thought that He loved us enough to die for us gives us hope and makes us better.

When you and I preach the Sermon in the Supper we portray two things: --

1. The dreadfulness of sin.

Man's sin nailed the Son of God to Calvary's cross. Nothing else did it. No one can assist in preaching this sermon without realizing that fact. There isn't any room at the Lord's Table for one who has any sense of his own merit.

2. The sufficiency of Christ's blood to put away sin.

His sacrifice for our sins was sufficient for our full salvation. "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." At the cross of Christ, and there alone, have men found release from sin. Nothing else can release us from the guilt, the penalty, the power and the presence of sin. How terrible sin is, seeing that salvation was possible only through the death of the Lord!

The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what Jesus accomplished there. This is a primary truth in Christianity and it is all-important. After all our wanderings afield we must come back to it. At the end of a long illness, the Bishop of Durham was asked what he was thinking about. He replied, "I have been coming back from all my studies to remember that Jesus died for me." Charles H. Spurgeon declared that he had lived four words, "Jesus died for me," and that he intended to die by them. The Lord's Supper presents to us the Saviour in the act of our emancipation, for we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Precious doctrine of the atonement, the world's only hope!

II. The Christ of Today.

The Lord's Supper is not only a symbol of a past fact, but also of a present reality. It not only tells us of what Christ has done for us, but also of what He is doing in us. He who once died for us now lives in us. The Supper symbolizes the fact that our spiritual life receives its nourishment from Christ. It signifies the dependence of the soul upon Christ for spiritual life and its nourishment. He is our ever-present Friend, invisible though real, and unseen yet felt.

III. The Christ of Tomorrow.

The Lord's Supper is a prophecy of a future event. It predicts that Christ will return to the earth. He has promised to come again, and He will. The Lord's Supper shows His death until He comes again. Every time we observe it we proclaim to the world that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again according to His own promise. The hope of His return is what sustained the early Christians and made them invincible. They were not afraid of anything. They endured sacrifice, suffering, persecution and martyrdom. Many of them died without sob or tear or regret, but with a song which ceased only when their pallid lips lost the power of speech.

As the Supper points us to the return of the Lord Jesus, it should encourage each one of us to be ready to meet Him at any moment, to seek to live holy and faithful lives for Him, to dedicate self and substance to Him, to strive to win souls to Christ and win lives for Him, and to send missionaries to proclaim the message of Christ to all nations.

As you assist in preaching the Sermon in the Supper, even bear in mind that no one has any right to substitute a gospel of human fellowship for the memorial celebration of the Lord's Supper. His Supper must ever be a memorial remembrance of Him and not a feast of friends. Whoever partakes of the Lord's Supper in order to show his fellowship with any human being certainly perverts the Lord's Supper.

Christ is about to bestow an honor upon us by asking us to assist in preaching the Sermon in the Supper. In doing so He expects us to proclaim the Christ of Yesterday, the Christ of Today, and the Christ of Tomorrow. God forbid that you, who are His children and members of this church, should fail to help your church to preach the Sermon in the Supper. But before you attempt to preach it, He would have you to dedicate yourself anew to Him. He certainly expects you to remember Him in the spirit of deep humility, grateful love, faithful obedience and joyous hope.