

THE LORD'S SUPPER

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." I Corinthians 11:26.

It is rather remarkable that the passage connected with this text should be the only apostolic teaching which we have respecting its observance. In the gospels we have the records of the incident from which this ordinance takes its origin. Although we would have expected Peter or John to have given us detailed instruction about its observance, neither of them referred to it. Paul alone wrote about it.

The Lord's Supper has a distinct meaning. It has a message for the believer and for the world. It pictures truth for believers in connection with the past, the present, and the future. It is a commemoration, a meditation, and an anticipation. Concerning the Lord's Supper there are three things which our text tells us.

I. It Is A Practice.

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup." The Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ for those who believe in Him, and they are to observe it frequently and prayerfully. It is, therefore, His ordinance and is to be observed by and in His churches. All members of a church should observe the Supper at appointed times in the Lord's house and in the spirit of the Lord. The regular practice of observing the ordinance will enrich the life of believers, cause them to love their Lord more, and bring them to a more loyal and faithful devotion to Christ and His church.

II. It Is A Proclamation.

"Ye do shew forth the Lord's death." This beautiful ordinance relates to Christ's death. The silent bread and the voiceless wine should tell the world that Christ died, and that, through His broken body and His poured-out blood sinners receive eternal life. His death is what is held up to view in this Supper. It is not the Lord's life that is emphasized by it, splendid as that life was in its unsullied holiness. It is not His teaching that is celebrated, although the world has admitted that as a teacher 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 about Him. That Jesus died for us ought to be our first thought when we awake in the morning. It ought, also, to be gratefully remembered as we fall asleep at night. Furthermore, it ought to give purity to our thoughts, quality to our words, and tone to our actions.

This Supper sets forth Christ's sacrificial 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.

The Lord's Supper portrays 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 by 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!

The Lord's Supper is not only a symbol of a part 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. Christ's death is chosen for special celebration because it is the most important part of all that He did or suffered. All the doctrines of the gospel revolve around Christ's death as the planets revolve around the sun. Here lies the source of all your hopes, and here you will find the well-spring of all your joys. The death of the Saviour gives us life; His wounds heal us; His agonies bring us peace; and His tortures yield us ease. We are delighted to remember Him, feeling it to be less a duty than a privilege, and far more a pleasure than merely a service.

1. It is a proclamation to us.

This observance of the Lord's Supper has a power to speak to our hearts, to touch us, and to help us to open the springs of praise. We, therefore, must not eat and drink "unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body." The bread is nothing in itself, and the wine is nothing in itself. That which the bread sets forth is everything, feed thou on that; that which the wine portrays is everything, see to it that thou art a partaker of that.

2. It is a proclamation by us.

At the Lord's table each Christian can express faith in the death of Christ and proclaim the message of His grace in redemption for all men. It is the clear proclamation of the message of Christ. To any who may be spectators while the rest of us are observing this ordinance, as we do so we are saying to you that "We do, each of us, believe that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; we have put our confidence in His death as making reconciliation for us before God; we personally avow our own vital faith in Him; and we declare to you that He is our salvation. As we partake of these elements we are saying to you, "We believe in Jesus Christ, in His broken body and in His poured-out-blood." We should feed upon Him; the heart on His love, the will on His commandments, the understanding on His Word, and the whole sinful man upon His atoning death. We must remember Him as the One who laid down His life for us, who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, who died the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. To shew forth Christ's death most truly is to show it in its power, to proclaim the might of that love as it reveals itself forgiving, saving, cleansing, gladdening, and triumphant in our lives.

III. It Is A Prophecy.

"Till He come." 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 very thought of His return humbles us and thrills us. Every time we observe the Lord's Supper 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 or anybody. 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.

The memory of Christ's death is intended to quicken the hope of His return. The two belong together. He has come and died, therefore, He will come again and reign. 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 at the Lord's table. And He certainly expects us to remember Him in the spirit of deep humility, grateful love, faithful obedience, and joyous hope.