

'Do This in Remembrance of Me'

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The Last Supper

The Gospel of Mark describes how Jesus and his twelve disciples journeyed from Bethany to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead to prepare a special place for their meeting. It is impossible that the strange instructions, which Jesus gave for finding the room, were to prevent Judas from knowing the location in advance and informing the High Priest. In this way Jesus was able to celebrate the meal with his disciples without being disturbed.

'So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you..."' (Mark 14:13 -16)

In Israel it was a woman's task to collect water from the wells and so it would have been easy for the disciples to recognize the man carrying the water pitcher as Jesus had described. This is an example of how Jesus could foretell future events before they happened. So, just as Jesus said, the man led the disciples to the upper room where they would celebrate the Passover together.

Although the hour was late, and darkness had fallen by the time the disciples entered the room, they were with their master Jesus, described in the Gospel of John as *'the light of the world'* (John 8:12; 9:5). Jesus knew that very soon he was to be handed over to evil men to be crucified and so he was under immense mental pressure. We read in the gospel of Luke that, at this time of great trial, Jesus really needed the fellowship of his disciples and so he said to them, *'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.'* (Luke 22:15).

The disciples didn't understand the words *'before I suffer'* because they were too busy arguing amongst themselves about

who was to be the greatest (Luke 22: 24). John explains how Jesus gently corrected them by his own example. When the supper was ready, he took the role of a servant and, taking off his outer clothing, he picked up a towel and poured water into a bowl. He then began to wash the feet of each of his disciples and to wipe them with the towel he had tied around his waist (John 13:4-5).

'While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me." They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born. "' (Mark 14:18-21).

As the night grew on, Jesus knew that it would soon be time for Judas to leave and fulfill his evil work. He knew that it was his last opportunity to spend precious moments with his disciples, but it filled him with sadness that one of them had chosen to betray him. The thoughts of Jesus are expressed in the Psalms,

'Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.' (Psalms 41: 9).

It would have been with great sadness that Jesus, fully aware of Judas' intentions, gave the bread to him and said, *'What you are about to do, do quickly'* (John 13:26-27).

'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. "' (Mark 14:22-24).

The apostle Paul, by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus Christ, focused upon the importance of this simple feast of bread and wine:

'For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: 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." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

The simplicity of the memorial meal instituted by Jesus is in stark contrast to the complicated ritual of the Passover. In fact the bread and the wine had their origin two thousand years before Jesus in the offering of Melchizedek, king of Salem.

'Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God , Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."' (Genesis 14:18-20).

The Bible speaks of Jesus as *'a priest forever. in the order of Melchizedek'* (Hebrews 7:17). This is because the necessity of Jesus' priesthood preceded both the Passover and the Levitical Priesthood.

The Bread

The actual supper followed this order of events. First the bread was prayed for and eaten followed by the wine.

'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."' (Mark 14:22).

The bread represented the body of Jesus but was not literally his body. John speaks of Jesus as *'the bread that came down from heaven'* (John 6:41). This is referring to God's special plan with Jesus his son as saviour of the world. The Psalmist describes Jesus as *'the son of man you [God] have raised up for yourself'* (Psalm 80:17). Like the bread that the disciples were about to eat, Jesus' body had been specially prepared (Hebrews 10:5).

The bread at the last supper had almost certainly been prepared without leaven – a kind of yeast used to make bread rise. The Bible often uses 'leaven' as a symbol to represent sin. Just as the bread had no leaven, so Jesus had no sin.

'...but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin' (Hebrews 4:15).

Just as Jesus broke the power of sin in his own body, so he also broke the bread. The bread represented how Jesus defeated sin by his perfect life and his obedience to his Father - obedience even to the point of death. Jesus then gave the bread to his disciples to teach them that all those who believe in Jesus, and are baptised into him, *'have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all'* (Hebrews 10:10).

Baptism

We cannot discuss the connection between the bread and wine and fellowship without first mentioning baptism.

Baptism is itself an act of fellowship on our part. It is an identification of our fellowship with the death (and life) of

Christ: *'having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead'* (Colossians 2:12)

The starting point of the following discussion of fellowship is that just as the disciples had been baptised before eating bread and wine with Jesus, so must we be (see John 3:5).

Fellowship

The bread symbolises the fellowship the disciples shared with Jesus' victory over sin and death. It is eaten as a sign of shared fellowship with Christ.

'One loaf... one body' (1 Corinthians 10:17)

Bread is made up of many individual grains of wheat which are ground together to make one loaf. As Paul said *'we, who are many, are one body, for we are all partake of the one loaf'* (1 Corinthians 10:17). Jesus was showing his disciples that our fellowship is with him and with the Father.

'And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ' (1 John 1 :3).

Jesus carefully took bread., and blessed, and broke it, then gave it to each of them individually. In the same way, our fellowship with Christ is an individual fellowship. If we personally are walking in light, then we have fellowship with Christ as symbolised by the bread. If we share this loaf with others, our fellowship with them is dependent upon them also walking in light.

'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin' (1 John 1 :7).

Our fellowship with Christ, and with one another, is dependent upon our faithful walking in the light. So therefore we must be careful how we live our lives to ensure our fellowship with Christ in the breaking of bread. Note that in the above verses we see that secondary to the main element of fellowship, that is fellowship with the Father and his son, Christ, there is also the question of fellowship with each other.

The question of fellowship can be difficult – and is a question of balance. But the Bible does provide guidelines: Firstly, we can see that even in New Testament times fellowship was not extended to everyone:

'But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.' (1Corinthians 5:11)

Paul was here instructing the church in Corinth not to have fellowship with one brother who was in a sexually immoral relationship. The church had to bar him from eating with them for a time so that he would repent and be restored. In the second letter to Corinth we see that Paul's medicine worked the brother did repent and was restored (see 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

This case of suspending fellowship was for wrong deeds, but Paul also applied the same medicine in the case of wrong teaching (compare 1Corinthians 5:5 with 1 Timothy 1 :20).

The apostle John, following on from his words on fellowship (1 John 1:7 as above), and right lifestyle (1 John 1:8 -2:17), also had a warning on right teaching (1 John 2; 18-27).

John expands this warning in his first letter:

'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit, that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world' (1 John 4:1-3).

John was so concerned about this false teaching that he repeated the warning in his second letter: *'Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.'* (2 John 7)

We can draw two major conclusions from these warnings: Firstly, that John wanted the believers to avoid fellowship with false teaching as well as with false practice. Secondly, that he was particularly concerned with false teaching about Christ.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of what the particular false teaching was, but note that John does not instruct the believers to avoid fellowship with those who deny that Jesus Christ came 'in a body'. (Even the Jews and Romans recognised that Jesus came with a body or they would not have nailed that body to a cross). John's concern was more subtle: with those who deny that Jesus Christ came 'in the flesh'.

The writer to the Hebrews made clear that Jesus coming 'in the flesh' meant more than just coming 'in a body':

'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, Because he himself

suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.' (Hebrews 2:14-18)

(See also Matthew 1:1, Mark 13:32, Luke 2:6, 2:40, 2:52, John 4:28,20:17, Hebrews 4:15,5:7-8.)

If our fellowship is truly first of all '*with the Father and the Son*', then, as John argues, we should not be sharing this fellowship with anyone who teaches wrong things about the Father and the Son.

One thing in particular which is very relevant today is that any Christians do not truly believe the doctrine that Paul says is of '*first importance*', that '*Christ died for our sins*' (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Yes, they will say, Christ's body died, but not Christ himself. Many, if not most, Christians today believe and teach that Jesus went elsewhere as a spirit while his body was in the tomb for three days. He himself, they teach, did not die.

But the Lord Jesus himself says: '*I was dead*' (Revelation 1:18)

Just as John and Paul withdrew fellowship from those who had wrong actions, in the same way both apostles taught that we are not to turn a blind eye to serious wrong teaching -even if it would be more convenient for us to do so.

However what both apostles are talking ~bout are wrong teachings about the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Not every difference of opinion is a basis for such drastic action. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul reprimands them for not sharing fellowship as one. One of the arguments he uses is that they should not have a double standard for baptism and fellowship:

'For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body' (1 Corinthians 12:13)

This argument of Paul's still makes sense today: if someone has truly been *'baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?'* (Romans 6:3), then we cannot refuse to break with them the bread that *'proclaims the Lord's death until he comes'* (1 Corinthians 11 :26).

The opposite of this is also true. If someone has not been truly *'baptised into the death of Christ'*, or for example was baptized without understanding that Christ truly *'died for our sins'* (he himself, not only his body died) then we are doing them no favour by extending bread that is secondary to be taken as a reminder of our baptism.

The Wine

Following the bread, Jesus took wine and gave it to his disciples to drink: *'Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many"'* (Mark 14:23-24).

Like the bread, the wine was not literally the blood of Jesus, but it represented his blood. Jesus was the *'true vine'* (John 15:1), who, though crushed like grapes in the winepress, was preserved by the Spirit of God within him. It is important to understand what blood meant to the people of Israel. Under the old law of Moses, the Israelites were prohibited from eating blood because it was the life source of the animal.

'But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat.' (Deuteronomy 12:23).

In the same way, the wine represented the blood of Jesus that was poured out for us, but also his perfect life and sinless obedience to God.

'He poured out his life unto death' (Isaiah 53: 12)

'And became obedient to death – even death on a cross!'
(Philippians 2:8).

Because of the sinless life of Jesus, all those who believe and are baptised into him are covered by his righteousness. Our sins are forgiven because of him. This is what he meant when he said: *'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'* (Matt 26:28).

The wine is symbolic of the blood of Jesus through which we receive forgiveness and remission of sin. *'For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement – for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life'* (Leviticus 17:11).

The shedding of the blood of Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, was essential for the forgiveness of sin as the book of Hebrews says *'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'* (Hebrews 9:22).

Jesus spoke of the shedding of his blood as *'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'* (Matthew 26:28). The New Testament of which Jesus spoke was the covenant referred to in Jeremiah,

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their

forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

"No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness, and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The blood of Jesus was shed for the remission of sin. When our sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ they are gone, forgotten, and never to be remembered. God has said that as *'far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us'* (Psalm 103:12). God has promised that when we are forgiven through the blood of Christ, he will not remember our sins anymore (Hebrews 10:17).

This is very important because it frees us from the burden of guilt for all the sins we commit. When our sins are forgiven, they are totally removed, and gone forever. This wonderful freedom is one of the great comforts which we can know in Christ Jesus our Lord.

At the table of the Lord

These are the things which we remember as we take the wine and *'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings'* (Philippians 3:10).

With these deeply personal considerations before us, we need to examine whether we are walking in the light and to acknowledge and confess our sins, the partaking of the bread and the wine is a very serious matter.

The apostle Paul warns us, *'Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.'* (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

It is important that we examine ourselves. This is a very personal matter which occurs between us and our God. It is an examination of our own lives not the lives of others. This self examination is essential before we dare to partake of the bread and the wine.

An important thing to remember, and use as a guide when we are examining ourselves before God, is that *'he who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy'* (Proverbs 28:13). So not only must we confess our sins before God, we must also forsake them. In other words, we must say in all sincerity, I am sorry, please forgive me, I will try not to do it again. In this way we remember Jesus week by week, for *'whenever you [we] eat this bread and drink this cup, you [we] proclaim the Lord's death until he comes'* (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is critical that we remember Jesus in this simple feast regularly, preferably, as the apostles did in the first century, weekly until the time when our Lord will share it with us in his kingdom.

'I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God' (Mark 14:25).

The memorial feast was both the institution of a memorial and a long term prophecy. By the sharing of these simple symbols of his death, Jesus looked forward to his resurrection. He was sustained by the *'joy set before him'* and *'endured the cross'* (Hebrews 12:2). He saw beyond the suffering of the cross to the day when the *'wedding of the Lamb'* would be celebrated with his disciples (Revelation 19:7). This was what Jesus meant when he said; *'I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it a new with you in my Father's kingdom.'* (Matthew 26:29)

Until that day we are commanded by Jesus to keep this ceremony in remembrance of him. Also we are promised: *'You are my friends if you do what I command'* (John 15:14)

Therefore let us with thoughtful care and self-examination remember Jesus in the bread and the wine as he has commanded and let us rejoice that *'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'* (John 15:13).

PETER ISLIP

'For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when 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." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26, NIV)

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