

Maundy Thursday

April 13, 2017

1 Corinthians 11:23-28 (EHV) – ²³For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵In the same way, after the meal, he also took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. ²⁷Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord’s body and blood. ²⁸Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Introduction

Many games involve “passing it on.” In a relay race, a runner runs his leg of the race as fast as he can. He approaches the next runner and carefully passes on the baton. Woe to the runner who drops the baton! The game of football has one goal: advance the football into the end zone. One of the fastest ways to do that is for the quarterback to pass the ball. Woe to the receiver who drops the pass! Many children’s games work on the “pass it on” principle. Think of a simple game of tag at recess. One child passes on the dreaded disease of “you’re it” until the one who is “it” can pass the “it” on.

Theme: Repent – Turn to Jesus and Receive a Special Assurance of Your Forgiveness

Tonight, St. Paul is going to “pass it on,” but he’s not playing games. What he passes on is as serious as the truth of Scripture and as precious as the person of Jesus Christ! Did you catch Paul’s passing of the baton of truth? **“I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...”** Paul received the truths of the Lord’s Supper from Jesus. Paul handed those exact truths on to the Corinthians. Tonight, the relay continues. What Paul received from Jesus and passed on to the Corinthians will be handed off to you. As we prepare to celebrate a most sacred meal, our Lenten encouragement to repent – to turn in faith to Jesus – continues. **Turn to Jesus and Receive a Special Assurance of Your Forgiveness.**

Sermon Exposition

If there ever was a church that was in desperate need of a refresher course on the celebration of Holy Communion, it was the Corinthians. They had by and large botched their celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Instead of a feast of salvation, the Corinthians had turned it into a celebration of self-indulgence. Just before our text begins, Paul goes so far as to say that the Corinthians were no longer celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Oh, they were celebrating, all right – just not what Christ had instituted. Their consistent misuse of the Lord’s Supper left them feasting at a buffet of drunkenness and debauchery.

Drunk at the Lord’s Supper? How did that happen? In the Corinthian congregation, there was a regular meal called an *agape feast*, a love feast. This meal either included or was immediately followed by a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. About the closest thing we could equate this to would be to have a Maundy Thursday potluck supper with PLENTY of wine flowing in the church basement before coming upstairs to celebrate Holy Communion.

Drunkenness wasn’t the Corinthians’ only issue. Some were using terrible manners – cutting in line and elbowing others out of the way. Others viewed the Lord’s Supper as a buffet – an opportunity to satisfy a hungry stomach. The abuse that tops the list, however, is the matter of divisions: some of the rich wanted nothing to do with the poor; some people followed Paul, others were all about Apollos, some preferred Peter, still others boasted about their dedication to Christ alone. Instead of celebrating Holy Communion, they were celebrating an unholy disunion. Instead of a wonderful unity rooted in God’s Word, they were splitting off into cliques and factions. They were expressing their lovelessness and self-indulgence before the Lord’s altar! It’s no wonder that Paul later says: **“That’s why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.”** The *Lord’s Supper* had

become the *Corinthian's* Supper – and they weren't blessed because of it. They were sinning spiritually and suffering bodily.

How does Paul handle the fiasco that the Corinthians were mistaking for Holy Communion? He turns them back to a proper use of the Lord's Supper by returning them to the clear words of Jesus: **"I received from the Lord what I also delivered 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 the meal, he also took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"** With the clear words of Jesus, Paul calls them to turn aside from man-made agendas and appetites. "This isn't YOUR supper; this is the LORD'S Supper. This supper is God's gracious gift, not man's toy to tinker with. This supper proclaims Christ's sacrifice for you! It's not providing another opportunity to party with friends."

The Lord's Supper is Christ's gift to us. In his Supper, Jesus gives us a gift that keeps on giving. He blesses unworthy sinners with the gift of himself – in a most wonderful way! Jesus' Word assures us that when we receive the bread and wine, we also receive his true body and blood for the personal forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus says, **"This IS my body"** and **"This IS my blood."** Jesus' body and blood are really present in, with, and under the bread and wine. How can the body and blood of Jesus be present? I have no idea. How can we be certain that Jesus' body and blood are present? This is how: The Son of God, who does not and cannot lie, promises it! The Son of God, with whom all things are possible, provides it! In other words, don't let your brain get in the way. The Lord's Supper isn't given for your logical speculation or scientific investigation. The Lord's Supper is given for your comfort!

And we need Jesus' comfort! You and I come tonight as we are. We come with our sins – sins open and sins secret, sins "little" and sins "large," sins accidental and sins willful, sins ugly and sins awful. We come as we are – sinful from birth and by nature separated from God!

And, in spite of all of that, Jesus comes as he is tonight – the friend of sinners, the Savior of sinners. He comes to us tonight sacramentally and spiritually to make us whole! Turn to Jesus tonight for a special assurance of your forgiveness. Know for certain that just as surely as you stand before the Lord's altar, just as surely as your ears hear the Words of Jesus' institution, just as surely as your tongue tastes the bread and your lips sip the wine, so surely do you receive the body and blood of Jesus – the body and blood given upon the cross to save you from all your sins. There's no more personal, no more intimate way of bringing Christ's forgiveness to us as individuals than his Holy Supper. Jesus gives sinners the very gift of himself! And where Jesus is – THERE we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through him!

Such a gift! That's why Satan works so hard to get people to "drop the baton" when it comes to the Lord's Supper. The objections to Jesus' body and blood being truly present with the bread and wine are many. Every one of those objections comes from people's brains working too hard instead of simply trusting in Jesus' promise with childlike faith. Some of the more popular objections are these:

- IS doesn't mean is. What Jesus actually means is "this *represents* my body." The only problem is that throughout the entire earth, in every language known to man, "is" always means "is."
- Others will say, "How can Jesus' body and blood be in more than one place at once?" The answer: This isn't the body of a mere mortal. This is the very body of the Son of God – the same body that walked on water and right through walls!
- Others will challenge, "What good can physical eating and drinking do for the soul?" Jesus answers, **"This is my body and blood given for the forgiveness of all your sins."**
- Others try to do the math: "How can Jesus give us body and blood, bread and wine all at the same time?" Answer: How did God create the universe in six days? How can God be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – yet only one God? How can Jesus be true God and true man in one person? The answer: **"With God, all things are possible."**

This evening, Jesus gives us his body and blood for our forgiveness and our strengthening. Let's praise him for it! Jesus deliberately gives his children the gift of himself!

Such a great blessing needs to be treated reverently and responsibly. It's that way with anything in life. We purchase a new car – a wonderful blessing. That car needs to be taken care of. The Lord blesses us with a child. That child needs to be fed, educated, and trained in the Word. The Lord blesses us with a husband or a wife. Our spouse requires our total commitment and loving care. Blessings carry responsibilities. So it is with the awesome blessing of the Lord's Supper: It needs to be received reverently and used responsibly – in a word, faithfully.

Paul concludes: **“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood. Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”** Because Jesus' body and blood are really present in this meal, we need to make sure that we're partaking of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. We don't want to run the risk of sinning against the very body and blood that's given to save us!

What does “unworthy manner” mean? First of all, let's be clear on what it *doesn't* mean! The Bible doesn't say, **“WHOEVER IS unworthy will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood.”** Could it be that someone avoids Communion because of something they've done? Their guilt makes them feel “unworthy” to receive the Lord's Supper. If so, this is the meal in which they receive Jesus' forgiveness precisely for what's ailing their conscience! Jesus' body and blood pays for the exact sin that makes them feel so badly! The Bible isn't talking about *unworthy people*. If we needed to wait until we were worthy to receive the Lord's Supper, no one would ever receive it. No pastor would ever be worthy enough to administer it.

Paul isn't writing about *unworthy people*. He's writing about an *unworthy manner* of receiving it. The word unworthy originally meant “a scale or balance.” The word also was used to denote “something that equals another thing.” In other words: Let our use of the Lord's Supper match up with what the Lord's Supper really is. The Supper is for my forgiveness; therefore, I need to recognize my need for forgiveness. The Supper is the Lord's Supper; therefore, I dare not treat it like it's mine alone. In the Supper, we receive Christ's body and blood; therefore, in simple faith, we rejoice in Jesus' real presence, rather than rationalize it away. A worthy, faith-filled reception of the Lord's Supper is one that simply takes God's Word on the matter of what Communion is, gives, and means.

A faithful reception of the Lord's Supper means that we'll examine ourselves beforehand. There's a helpful picture behind the words “examine oneself.” The same word was originally used to test gold to see if it was genuine or not. The picture's clear. We need to examine ourselves to make sure that our reasons for receiving the Lord's body and blood are genuine and biblical. Test yourself by asking the following questions:

- Am I a sinner? Yes!
- Do I desire the Lord's forgiveness? Yes!
- Does Jesus offer me his forgiveness in his Supper? Yes!
- Do I believe that Jesus' body and blood are truly present in this meal? Yes!
- Am I united in mind and heart with what this body of believers believes and teaches? Yes!

Now what? Receive the gift of the Lord's Supper, the food of Christ's forgiveness! He instituted it for you, just as surely as he lived for you, died for you, and lives again for you!

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, the Lord passes on an awesome treasure to you this evening. He deliberately gives us himself when he blesses us with his body and blood. And so tonight, we turn again to Jesus for a special assurance of his forgiveness. This assurance is *always* yours through Jesus. This assurance is yours *only* through Jesus. Amen!