

Meditations on the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ

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 Title: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for man for forgiveness of sins"
 Text: Matthew 26:20-30; 1 Cor. 11:23-26
 Theme: God has given to His church a means of remembering and celebrating the power of the cross as a past fact (i.e. our justification), a present reality (i.e. our sanctification), and a future hope (i.e. our glorification).

As a fellowship we have the opportunity to remember and to celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ through the visual of the Lord's Table.

The Lord's Table remembers and celebrates the cause and consequence of our fellowship with God and with those within His body. Yet the Table has been for many a battlefield and a source of embitterment. Listen to Philip Melancton from 1544:

"Is there anything more sorrowful, more deserving of tears than that [the Lord's Supper] should be used as a subject of strife and division?"

Philip Melancton asked this question in August 1544. The Reformers were united in their opposition to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Table, but were divided as to what the elements actually were.

In commenting on the Roman Catholic view and that of evangelicalism and the divide between the two listen to the following statement:

The principal reason why they were burned was because they refused one of the peculiar doctrines of the Romish Church. On that doctrine, in almost every case, hinged their life or death. If they admitted it, they might live; if they refused it, they must die.

The doctrine in question was the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Did they, or did they not believe that the body and blood of Christ were really, that is, corporally, literally, locally, and materially, present under the forms of bread and wine after the words of consecration were pronounced? Did they or did they not believe that the real body of Christ, which was born of the Virgin Mary, was present on the so called altar so soon as the mystical words had passed the lips of the priest? Did they or did they not? That was the simple question. If they did not believe and admit it, they were burned.

"The Mass was one of the principal causes why so much turmoil was made in the Church, with the bloodshed of so many godly men." (Foxe's Book of Martry's, Preface to vol. iii. of "Acts and Monuments.") The sacrament of the altar was the main touchstone to discover the poor Protestants. This point of the real, corporal presence of Christ in the sacrament, the same body that was crucified, was the compendious way to discover those of the opposite opinion." (Fuller, Church History, vol. iii. p.399. Tegg's edition.) <http://www.williamtyndale.com/0reformersburned.htm>

Is what we believe as to the Table important? Is it a matter of life or death? To that I would say yes. The Table declares to us that our justification before the Father is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

How will they best hear it?

- How do we remember His death, burial, and Resurrection?

As we continue to focus on the celebration of the cross, let us not lose sight of what we are doing when we come to the Lord's Table. From previous studies we noted three ideas.

- A. What is the Communion Service? It is a time of reflection where His people remember the time when the communion of the Trinity was broken in order that communion with His people would be secured. The Communion Service speaks of our community as the people of God.
- B. As a fellowship we practice an **open** Communion Service. If you are a believer, we invite you to participate in our Communion Service. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, we invite you to observe the body of Christ as His body celebrates His Table as a loving and gracious family.

As an unbeliever we want you to hear the gospel that is in the Communion Service (1 Cor. 11:26). The body that was broken and the blood that was shed are so that the charges brought against you by your sins were addressed and dropped. And the only way this could happen is through the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In addition to what we noted in our previous study I would like to consider the following thoughts as it relates to the Lord's Table.

- C. We believe the elements used in the Communion Service are representative of His broken body and shed blood (Matt. 26:26-28, 1 Cor. 11:23-25 ["This is My body, This is My blood"]). We believe that, like the Word of God, fellowship with His people, and prayer, the Communion Service is a means God uses to communicate His activity to and through His people (John 6:51-58 ["He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life"]). This is not a saving activity. But it is an activity that God uses for the joy of His people in the sustaining of His ongoing work (John 1:12 ["But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God"])).

There are four primary views as it relates to the way the Lord's Table is celebrated.

SUMMARY OF VARIOUS VIEWS

Transubstantiation – the substance (fundamental reality) of the bread and wine is transformed in a way beyond human comprehension into that of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, but the accidents (physical traits, including chemical properties) of the bread and wine remain; this view is held by the Roman Catholic Church.

Consubstantiation ("In, with and under the forms") - the body and blood of Jesus Christ are substantially present in, with and under the substance of the bread and wine, which remain. This is the view held by most Lutherans, and some Anglicans.

Symbolism - the bread and wine are symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus Christ and in partaking of the elements the believer commemorates the sacrificial death of Christ. This view is also known as "memorialism."

Real Spiritual presence also called "pneumatic presence" - not only the spirit, but also the true body and blood of Jesus Christ (hence "real") are received by the sovereign, mysterious, and miraculous power of the Holy Spirit (hence "spiritual"), but only by those partakers who have faith. This view excludes not just symbolism but also trans- and consubstantiation. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord's_Supper

As a fellowship we would probably hold to a Symbolic approach to the Lord's Table. Personally, I think because we "do" the Lord's Table numbly or without thought our symbolism has a tendency to take the weight of what we are doing out of the remembrance and celebration. Although the other three views are perhaps too much, there is something for me that is more than mere symbolism, but I do not know what or how. It is the weight of this moment that I want us to experience every time we come to the Table.

This is why we have avoided calling the Table a sacrament and simply refer to it as an ordinance. Yet "What is meant by Sacrament?" Sacrament is a term used within the larger scope of Christianity. Often the idea of sacrament is that it is an enablement as it relates to man's justification before God. It is often coupled with individual salvation. We do not believe, however, there is any saving grace in the celebration of the Communion Service. We do believe, however, that there is benefit in participating in the Communion Service for the believing.

- D. We believe the Communion Service focuses on family and participation and not individualism or isolation (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 33, 34 ["So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another"]). As an expression of this imagery we will provide an opportunity for you to greet the people around you and state your personal appreciation for having them as a part of the WBC family (Ps. 133:1 ["Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity"]).

This idea will become more pronounced under “A” of the Communion Service Outline.

Howard Marshall notes how, “(10) The New Testament celebration of the Lord's Supper included, at least on some occasions, **an expression of the unity and love of believers. The inclusion of some symbol of unity appropriate to our culture, such as shaking hands, and of some expression of concern for the needy, such as the giving of money for charitable purposes,** is desirable today.” http://lords-supper.org/resources/marshall_ls.html

- E. We believe the entire service should be one of community and participation. We want you to know the people of this fellowship. We should be making every effort to tie into the lives of others.
- F. Although confession of sin is not confined to the Communion Service, you may find there are relational issues coming to your mind right now that are hindering your communion between a brother or sister in the WBC family (1 John 4:20 [“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” See also Matt. 18:15]). You can and need to make that right with them.

In the historical context of 1 Corinthians the sin was body division. What caused the division was not the issue, that division existed was. If the need is for believers to examine themselves, then it is relational divisions that stand in need of being addressed. If you have a grudge with someone in our fellowship or within the larger body of Christ, then you need to address it. I do not personally believe it should keep you from the Table, but it is a sin (i.e. that of an unforgiving spirit or a bitter spirit) that has inherent demerit (as does all sin).

If I am harboring and nurturing wickedness in my attitude and actions, then I should fear the horrible consequences of such sin in my life and in the lives of those I love. But it is not the Table I fear or even the Lord I fear, I fear the inherent demerit of the sin that God has woven into the very fabric of the sin. That is what I fear. If the Table moves me to deal with my sin, then praise the Lord.

- G. The Table tells me that I am to forgive even as I have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). If I am harboring bitterness in my heart towards another individual, then I need to deal with it so I can let it go.

I consider body unity as a leading fruit of the Spirit. Body unity does not negate problems. Body unity does, however, demand confrontation and resolution whenever necessary. If we dealt with conflict or misunderstanding when it is small and manageable, then a lot of larger issues could be resolved.

- H. It is important to remember that your obedience as a believer is not making you worthy to partake of the Lord's Table no more than your disobedience disqualifies you from partaking of the Lord's Table (Col. 1:12 [“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us

to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light”)). The only reason you can come to the Table is because of what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross and is doing daily (Col. 2:10 [“And in Him you have been made complete”]). And the only sin that will keep you from the Table is your sin of unbelief (1 Cor. 11:28 [“But a man must examine himself”] 2 Cor. 13:5 [“Test yourself to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves”]).

- I. Historically, we have been taught that before we could participate in the Communion Service we had to make sure we were free of any known sin. I personally do not believe that is an issue as it relates to the Communion Service. I do believe that if you have a sin issue, then you need to take care of it regardless as to whether it is before the Communion Service or not. Sometimes, however, because the Communion Service does speak of us as a family, issues between members become accentuated. My counsel to you is for you to deal with it. Before, during, or after, I do not care when, but I do care that you deal with it.
- J. Preparation of heart and mind happens as we meditate on the message of the Communion Service. The Communion Service calls us to remember His death, burial, and Resurrection. It calls us to recall our own salvation experience and it calls us to reflect on His imminent coming (1 Cor. 11:23-26 [“You proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”]).

(12) The New Testament links together past, present and future in the significance of the Lord’s Supper; it looks back to the death of Jesus for our salvation, it rejoices in the gift of present salvation and fellowship with the risen Lord, and it looks forward to his coming and the inauguration of the heavenly banquet. The church today needs to ask whether it does justice to all these elements and thus celebrates the Supper with real thanksgiving and fullness of joy. http://lords-supper.org/resources/marshall_ls.html

Yet the Table has become a place of embattlement and embitterment. Listen to the following statement:

What are the distractions to the Table?

There is always a real danger of cluttering the Table with so much preference that we lose the simplicity of what we have. Listen to the following quote.

The elements of the Lord’s Supper (the bread and fruit of the vine) were fought over: Does one use leavened or unleavened bread? This became a major point of controversy and division between the Roman and Greek churches. Does one use wine or grape juice? If one uses wine, does he mix it with water, and if so...how much? Does one stand, sit, or kneel when receiving the elements? All of these questions and literally *hundreds* more, became points of division among the people of God!

Let us save ourselves from all of this and focus on the supremacy of God in all things. Let us see who He is, what He has done, and who we are in Him. This is the purpose of this act of worship.

- How do we celebrate the Communion Service?

Another major characteristic of the early observance of the Lord's Supper was its *lack of formality & ritualism*. It was observed very simply and in connection with a fellowship meal (The Agape -- "Love Feast" -- Jude 12). "The disciples followed their Lord's example, celebrating a love-feast, which would be enriched with memories of their Master and teaching from His nearest disciples, and closing with the more solemn thanksgiving for the broken body and the cup of blessing which Jesus had consecrated" (Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. 2, p. 68). The Lord's Supper began, "we believe, as a fellowship meal -- the Love Feast" (William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 57). The DIDACHE (*The Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*, which was written sometime between 70 - 110 A.D.) also indicates (in chapters 9 & 14) that the Lord's Supper and the Agape meal were celebrated together. However, by the beginning of the 2nd century the Lord's Supper and the Agape began to be separated from one another in many places. This was due to several factors, primarily: The abuses that were creeping in (see: I Corinthians 11:17-34; Jude 12; II Peter 2:13).

As the church began to grow and develop, it became increasingly organized, and with the organization came the rise of ceremony, ritual, and tradition. This impacted every area of church life and practice, including the Lord's Supper. No longer was it a simple memorial meal shared by Christian families in their homes and with fellow believers. Instead, it came to be viewed as a *Sacrament*, with a host of laws & regulations surrounding it. This "doctrine of the sacrament of the Eucharist" has taken this simple "feast of the Savior's dying love" and transformed it into the "innocent cause of the most bitter disputes and theological controversies" among God's people (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3 -- Nicene & Post-Nicene Christianity, p. 492).

Communion Service Outline

- A. After the opening song of the morning service the Worship Leader will make a statement similar to the following:

We participate in this morning's service as a family not as individuals. The melody and rhythm of the music are designed to allow us to sing "together"; as we give in the offering we are giving to a unified cause, we receive the message with our ears and hearts simultaneously. The Communion Service after the message is no different (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 33, 34 ["So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another"]). We remember the Lord's death together; we celebrate the victory of Christ and the justification of His Church as a family (John 17:21 ["As you, Father, are in Me, and I in you; that they also may be one in Us"]). The whole of this morning's service is the worshipful celebration of a family.

"In the apostolic period the Eucharist was celebrated *daily* in connection with a simple meal of brotherly love (the *Agape*), in which the Christians, in communion with their common Redeemer, forgot all distinctions of rank, wealth, and culture, and felt themselves to be members of *one family of God*" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1 -- Apostolic Christianity, p. 473).

- B. The Worship Leader will then exhort the congregation to greet one another; to express love and appreciation for each other.

- C. Following the morning sermon the Pastor will state the purpose of the Communion Service as a whole and will ask the congregation to contemplate the statements that are projected upon the screen. Meditate on the provided reading and/or listen to the message in song. At times we will have Scripture and at other times readings from Church History.

These statements are available to you in the supplementary page entitled “Communion Meditations.” These statements will explain in a practical manner the theology behind communion. The points we wish to communicate are “Unity” and “Celebration”. We would have our fellowship to see themselves as a family gathering around a table. Through encouraging celebration, mournful disappoint will dissipate and give way to victorious joy through remembering the death and Resurrection of Christ *for us* (Luke 22:19 [“Do this in remembrance of Me”]!

Music will be either played live or from a CD while the congregation reads the statements of purpose on the screen. (3 minutes)

Every musical selection involved in communion will follow the “principle of non-distraction.” Lyrically the selection will promote our theology and musically it will foster thoughtfulness.

- D. The Pastor will direct the attention of the congregation to the tables throughout the auditorium.

Each table will serve a “family group;” a microcosm of what is going on in the whole auditorium. In reading passages like 1 Corinthians 11 we understand that the biblical tradition has been to receive communion in fellowship around a table. Understanding this brings further awareness to our relationship with one another in receiving the elements.

The Pastor will have previously announced the meaningfulness of the elements (Matt. 26:26-28, 1 Cor. 11:23-25 [“This is My body, This is My blood”].

- E. The congregation will receive the elements.
- F. After the elements are distributed the Pastor will pray a prayer of thanksgiving (Eucharist).

A prayer of thanksgiving (Eucharist) is to follow the example of Christ in the upper room [Luke 22:17-19].

¹⁷ “And when **He had taken a cup and given thanks**, He said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹**And when He had taken some bread and given thanks**, He broke it and gave it to them, saying,

"This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:17-19).

- G. The congregation will be invited to partake of the elements.
- H. The Pastor will close the Communion Service and transition into the Benevolent offering with a prayer. The Benevolent offering is received.
- I. The Pastor will lead the people in singing the Doxology (or another appropriate hymn sung acapella as a prayer)

Singing a hymn is again to create a biblical awareness reminding us of the upper room supper (Matt. 26:30).

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." ³⁰ **After singing a hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:26-30).

Today as you reflect on the power of His cross to rescue you from your sin, let us not forget that it is because of Him that we have victory over our sin. He is the reason that the Table has value to us as His people. May His Spirit enable us to never forget what is already true.

APPLICATION: (What does this look like?)

1. How to have 7 Sundays

Monday	Think about the sacrifice Christ made in your behalf.
Tuesday	Think about the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ for you
Wednesday	Are you celebrating the WBC family? What issues are so important as to keep you from enjoying God's family?
Thursday	Thank God for whom He is and what He has done
Friday	Thank God for what He is doing and will do
Saturday	Prepare your heart/mind for corporate worship on Sunday

2. How have I applied (or can I apply) this passage to my life?

- I take all of life and I compare it to who He is, what He has done, and who I now am in Him. In light of Him, how am I to evaluate this present difficulty?
- This part of the worship service is specifically accenting the Lord's death and the consequences of that death for His people. In another sense it is no different than our singing, our listening, our fellowship, and our

giving or whatever other aspect we bring to the worship service. It is all an expression of our individual and corporate worship of God. Its purpose is for us to focus on Him.

- Am I seeing my sin in light of His cross? What do I find so important in my sin that I would hold so firmly to it? Am I ready to give my sin up?
 - If I do not know Jesus Christ as my Savior, will I believe in Him today?
 - How can I carry the gospel with me on a daily basis?
3. How would a man, woman, married, single, youth, senior, seeker, etc., apply it?

The Lord's Table is trans-generational. The Table is impartial and non-discriminatory. It cares little for race, creed, color, or geographical location. The ground is truly level at the foot of the cross. All believers in this biblical economy are a part of one body.

4. Can I give them a 'take-home' application – something they can do at home, work or at school?

The Lord's Table is not something we remember only on the first Sunday of each month. The Table is something we are to carry with us from day to day.

5. How can I show them how to do it?

Today let go of your differences and cling to what we as a fellowship hold in common. Christ is bigger than our dissimilarities.

6. Have I kept Christ in the application?

The Table is a time for hope, healing, and wholeness. It is a time to see that in Christ there is true help for the helpless. May today be a time of personally healing in your life.