

Sunday, August 28th sermon: "Worthy at the Lord's Table -- Discerning Christ's Body"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Mark 14:12-26

The Lord's Table is a commemoration of the sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross, where He saved His people from their sin.

Jesus often spoke in spiritual metaphors, which the people misunderstood. He taught them that He is the Bread of Life, sent down from heaven, and if a man will eat of that bread, he will have everlasting life.

Christ is the spiritual bread and living water that brings eternal life to all who partake of it.

And He made it clear: we partake of His body and blood spiritually, by believing upon His promises, and trusting in His offering for our crimes.

The people demanded Christ give them physical bread as a sign by which they might believe, but Christ insisted, over and over again, that they must trust in His body and blood unto salvation.

But they wanted literal bread to eat, and when in their greed and unbelief they wrongly perceived Christ to be offering His physical flesh and blood for them to eat, they rejected His offer as too repulsive.

But we believers joyfully feast upon the Lord Jesus' body and blood spiritually, and partake of the bread and wine at the Lord's Table to remind us of what Jesus did for us on the cross, and to acknowledge publicly, that His literal, physical body slain and blood shed, is all our hope and life and joy forever!

The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for corrupting the celebration of the Lord's Table. All they were doing was bringing their food to eat at the church, and leaving out those poor believers who had nothing to bring. They wouldn't even wait for each other!

Paul rebuked them for confusing physical feasting with spiritual feeding upon Christ.

Paul told them that they were in fact NOT celebrating the Lord's Supper, because their behavior was so contrary to expressing the true meaning of Christ's memorial.

Like the crowds who rejected Jesus' teaching on these things, the Corinthian Christians were confounding eating literal, physical food with spiritual feasting upon Christ. The Lord's Table is supposed to express our complete dependence for our everlasting life upon Jesus' literal sacrifice at Calvary. It is not a physical meal for sustenance in this life, but rather a symbolic picture of Who and what we have placed our trust in: our savior the Lord Jesus, and His sacrifice as God's Lamb in our place and for our crimes.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with dinner on the ground, so long as everyone is included, and no one is made to feel ashamed due to their inability or poverty. But even then, if people attend the meetings of the church so they can be fed, and that in any way distracts from the spiritual feasting upon Christ, then it is a pollution of the Lord's feast.

Paul makes it clear, that he heard it directly from the Lord Jesus Himself by special revelation, how that Christ ordained this spiritual feast upon these physical symbols to picture His literal body and blood given to save His people.

Christ designated His Table as a remembrance of Himself!

And He did it just hours before He delivered Himself up to be crucified and slain to save us.

It is therefore a most solemn, critical, and joyous ordinance, that must be treated carefully, reverently, and with full knowledge of what Christ meant it to mean.

It was the very last meal that Jesus ate with His beloved disciples before He was slain in His love for us!

The Lord's Table was established by Jesus along the pattern of the Passover meal, but His sacrifice was far better than the paschal lamb, and saves His people unto eternity.

Note well that it was only the very first Passover lamb that saved God's people from the judgment of Egypt. All the subsequent meals were to remind the Israelites of how God had rescued them from His wrath by the blood of the substitute lamb on the doorposts of their homes.

So too, the Lord's Table does not save anybody. It does not forgive sin. Rather, it pictures that one time only when Jesus offered up Himself, and saved all His people forever from their sin.

Note also that when Jesus gave thanks for that bread and wine at the first Lord's Table, He Alone knew what it truly meant: it pictured His body mutilated, His blood shed in a cruel death.

And yet He gave thanks for it! How much love Jesus showed in doing such a thing!

Our hearts must express a congruent love when we partake of the symbols around Christ's Table! Love for Jesus, love for His sacrifice, and an expression of full faith and allegiance unto Christ Alone as our only hope!

The Apostle then adds, that as often as we eat that bread and drink that cup, we are preaching the Lord's death until He comes back again!

It could as well be read as a commandment: when you eat the bread and drink the cup around the Lord's Table, **PREACH CHRIST'S DEATH!**

Paul then warns against profanely or unworthily partaking at the Lord's Table for any purpose other than celebrating the offering of Jesus to save us.

If we are not thinking upon, displaying, rejoicing upon, and preaching the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for us on the cross, we will be judged by God.

If you are not saved, and are not trusting in the body and blood of Christ as your only means of salvation, you ought not to partake.

If you are trusting, in part or in whole, in your own power and ability and goodness for your salvation, you dare not partake.

If you are not relying solely upon the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed physically on the cross to take away your sins and redeem you unto God, you must not partake.

If you are participating because you want to fit in with the rest of the believers present, or if you are daydreaming and not rejoicing in the offering of Jesus, you should not partake.

If you come to the service, not to celebrate what Jesus did by dying for your crimes, but because you enjoy the fellowship and the pot luck supper, you ought not to partake at the Lord's Table.

Paul says we are to examine ourselves - to ascertain what the supper really means to us, to check our heart for celebration - and then we are in the light of the truth to feast upon Christ.

The error of not discerning the Lord's body means either that the church is not in unity and joined together as one in Christ, or that the purpose of the symbols is all confused in our minds and hearts.

We must eat of that bread and drink of that cup with the full and grateful knowledge that they point to Jesus' very flesh and blood, by which He made a sacrifice in our place and for our sins on the cross.

The dignity of the Lord's Supper reflects upon our love for the person of Christ, Who is present with us spiritually. Anything we do to degrade, or misapprehend, or confuse the purpose of Christ's supper, is an insult against Christ Himself.

We ought to partake of that supper with joyful hearts and unending gladness!

No wonder Charles Spurgeon wrote these precious words:

"Amidst us our Beloved stands,
And bids us view His pierced hands;
Points to His wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the Crucified.

"What food luxurious loads the board,
When at His table sits the Lord!
The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,

When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!

"If now with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs but see not Him,
Oh, may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face!

"Thou glorious Bridegroom of our hearts,
Thy present smile a heaven imparts:
Oh, lift the veil, if veil there be,
Let every saint Thy glories see!"