

# Communion

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     the passage that we read, the second passage that we read in Matthew's Gospel and chapter 26. And as I commented earlier, we will be concentrating our attention particularly on the words of Jesus that are sometimes described as His instituting this sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Now, you will be aware, I'm sure, that in different Christian traditions there is a difference in the terminology or the vocabulary used to describe what we will be participating in this morning.

One name that is not so common in our particular tradition, but that I'm sure we're familiar with, is the word Eucharist. And in some traditions that would be the word that would generally be used to describe what is to take place just in a few moments. Now, that particular word, and we are going to be really focusing on that word and the meaning of the word and what follows, that particular word, unlike the word sacrament that we tend to use, is a thoroughly biblical word and indeed one that we find in the very passage or in the very institution. The word sacrament, though it is a word that illustrates or communicates a biblical truth concerning the bread and the wine as symbols, nonetheless the word itself is not a biblical word, unlike Eucharist. The word Eucharist comes from a Greek verb that means to give thanks, and in the very institution we find that Jesus uses this word.

Interestingly, in the passage that we're going to be looking at in Matthew, the word that He uses or the word that is recorded for us is a synonym of that word to give thanks, but in Corinthians, the passage we ordinarily read and will be reading at the time of the actual celebration, it's that Greek word Eucharist from which we get Eucharist from which we get Eucharist, to give thanks. And so, that is one of the words very properly and helpfully that is used to describe what we are to participate in this morning.

What we participate in is a Thanksgiving meal, a Thanksgiving supper. This lies at the heart of what we will be doing. We will be giving thanks to Jesus as we gather around the table, as we eat the bread and as we drink the wine. What we are saying is, thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. That is what we declare. That is what we say as we participate. And as we consider these verses, verses 26 through 29 of Matthew chapter 26, I want us to have that thought, that reality as our guiding axiom, that the words, and perhaps more importantly, the sentiment behind the words, thank you, Jesus, would be to the very fore of what we say and consider. Why do we as Christians say thank you to Jesus?

[ 3 : 26 ] Well, where to start in answering such a question? But let me suggest that we can find three reasons why we say thank you to Jesus in these verses that we are considering. And the three reasons can be presented in the following way, and I'll mention what they are, and then we can consider them each in turn. First of all, we say thank you to Jesus for what He has done in the past. We address these words of thanks. We say thank you, Jesus, for what you have done in the past. But also we'll find in these verses that there is occasion given for us to say thank you to Jesus for what He does in the present. And then thirdly, we'll find in these verses that we find reason to say thank you to Jesus for what He will do in the future. We'll think of these three things. And in terms of the time that we will give to each, we will begin by giving more time, then a little bit less time, and then a shorter time for the third of these. Not necessarily that the time would be representative of the importance of the three, but just in terms of the material we want to cover. Three reasons why we say thank you to Jesus as we gather and celebrate this Lord's Supper. First of all, we say thank you to Jesus for what He has done in the past. Well, what did Jesus do in the past? What is Jesus here in the verses that we've read speaking to His disciples about? Well, it's very clear that He is speaking to them of His impending death. Both the bread and the wine clearly and powerfully point to His death. The bread,

Jesus explains in these verses, and He explains in both words and actions, points to His body that is soon to be broken, while the wine, Jesus Himself explains, points to His blood soon to be shed. It is clear in Matthew's account. It is stated explicitly in the account that we find in 1 Corinthians, where we read, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Jesus is speaking to His disciples about His death. Now, why would we as Christians, 2,000 years later, why would we thank Jesus for dying? In the absence of a coherent explanation, it could, to some perhaps, appear a little bizarre to thank Jesus for dying. But Jesus does give us an explanation as to why we have good reason to thank Him for His death. And He does so by the use that He makes and the explanation He gives for the bread and the wine so central to the occasion. And let's think of these two elements in turn and see how Jesus Himself explains their significance. And as we understand their significance and what they teach us concerning His death, so we would, with good reason, wish to say thank you to Jesus for that death. First of all, then, the bread. Now, to understand the significance of the bread, we need to appreciate, as the passage has made very clear, that Jesus was presiding over the celebration of the Passover. He told His disciples to go and prepare, make preparations for this band of Jewish men and to participate in the Passover. The Passover was the day when Jews remembered and celebrated the Lord's rescue of His people from slavery in Egypt, and very particularly the occasion when the Lord passed over and spared from the plague of death, or the death of the firstborn, those Israelite homes that were protected by the blood of a lamb painted on the lintels of their doors. And the Passover was an occasion, a celebration instituted by God when the people could remember that and give thanks for that deliverance. And at the Passover, the one presiding, in this case it was Jesus Himself, would break the bread, and He would declare, this is the bread of affliction, which our forefathers ate in the wilderness. The bread that was being broken was a reminder to the people of God's saving love, of His miraculous deliverance of His people from Egypt and indeed in and through the desert.

And when Jesus here presides over this Passover meal, and as He breaks the bread, Jesus here does something very extraordinary. He identifies Himself as the bread that has come down from heaven. He is the bread of life that will feed His people.

But for this bread to provide life, for this bread to provide deliverance, for this bread to feed the people, this bread, this bread, this bread, this bread must be broken. He took the bread, He gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, take and eat, this is my body. And as we, this morning, participate in this supper, we say thank you to Jesus for being the bread of life. We say thank you to Jesus for that body that was broken, that we might feed of it. But there is, of course, the other element that is present in the account, and indeed present here on the table before us, and that is the wine. And as regards the wine,

[ 10 : 05 ] Jesus is much more explicit and expansive in explaining the significance of the wine as it serves to represent His blood or His death. Notice what He says in the passage that we have there in verse 28.

Concerning the wine, this is what He says, This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. And there is a great deal that is packed into these few words that Jesus uses to explain the significance of this wine.

Well, what does it mean what we have there, these words that Jesus declares concerning the wine? Well, as we've noticed, Jesus there employs the language of covenant, so prominent in the Bible and in the Old Testament. The covenant, that arrangement whereby God ordered His special relationship with His own people. And in the Old Testament, a covenant, in order for that covenant to be valid, required or involved the shedding of blood. Indeed, as of anecdotal interest, the very verb that is used in Hebrew to speak of making a covenant, what perhaps in our Bibles would be translated as a covenant being made is the verb that means to cut. You would cut a covenant. And so in the very word and the very vocabulary that is used, we see that central to this covenant making was the requirement that blood that blood be shed. And the language that Jesus uses here in the upper room where He speaks of, this wine as my blood of the covenant, is language that is taken almost word from word from the language that we find in Exodus chapter 24 and verse 8. And we'll just read that now so that we can see the connections and see where it is that is the source, as it were, of the language that Jesus uses in explaining to His disciples what is going on as He gathers with them on that occasion. So in Exodus chapter 24 and verse 8, the passage is entitled there in our Bibles, the covenant confirmed. And then in verse 8 we read, Moses then took the blood of the animals that had been sacrificed. He sprinkled it on the people and said, this is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words. This is the blood of the covenant. There we read how on that occasion, that blood that had been shed was sprinkled by Moses on the people who were there gathered participating in this renewal of the covenant. And as the blood is sprinkled, so it represented cleansing from sin, but also a consecration to a new life of service to God. The problem, the recurring problem that we find as we read through the Old Testament and this relationship between God and His people ordered by covenant, the recurring problem is that Israel proved incapable of keeping their covenant obligations.

In the passage that we refer to there in Exodus, we haven't, we didn't read the whole passage for reasons of time, but there it's interesting, the law of Moses is spoken of as the book of the covenant.

And so on the part of the people, their obligation within this covenant was to respect and to obey the book of the covenant or the law that had been given to them. But of course, they constantly failed.

[ 14 : 20 ] They were constantly finding themselves guilty of covenant breaking. And it is in that context of recurring, almost we might say inevitable covenant failure, that there emerged the promise of a new covenant that would at its heart provide lasting and full forgiveness for all who were brought under its protection. And we read of that new covenant that is anticipated by God through the prophet Jeremiah, that passage that we read just a few moments ago. Now, one intriguing element that is missing from the passage in Jeremiah announcing this new covenant is any reference to the blood of this covenant.

Where is the blood that will inaugurate and validate the covenant as was required? Well, as Jesus, here on this occasion in the upper room, as He declares to His disciples these words, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, what Jesus does is identify Himself as the one about to inaugurate this new covenant by the shedding of His blood by His impending death. Jesus goes on in what He says there in verse 28 to explain that the central benefit of the covenant to be inaugurated by His life was forgiveness of sins. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. This was the purpose of it, for the forgiveness of sins. This is what it would achieve for sinners. This new covenant would be based not on the faultless keeping of the law, boldly promised by the people but never delivered, but on God's forgiveness.

In the covenant being inaugurated by Jesus and by His death, forgiveness of sins would be made available to all who would put their trust in Jesus and on His saving work on their behalf, on His death in their place.

Now, as we appreciate that and we consider this really very fleetingly this morning, but as we do, perhaps even in a measure, begin to appreciate this central element of the new covenant, it maybe rather begs the question, generates a possible difficulty. Was there no hope of forgiveness for covenant breakers before Jesus and His death? It's certainly true, as the writer to the Hebrew can clearly and very boldly declare, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

And yet, forgiveness was available before Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. And it was available because that blood of bulls and goats and lambs, though devoid of any intrinsic capacity to forgive, pointed towards the Lamb of God who would indeed take away the sins of the world. These sacrifices pointed to Jesus and were made effective in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins of those who availed themselves of them as they trusted in what God instructed them to do. You see, the forgiving power of the death of Jesus, of the shed blood of Jesus, extends not only forwards to include us and to embrace us from the moment of His death. But the forgiving power of the death of Jesus extends backwards to cover all those who had put their trust in the promises of God. But Jesus here says one further thing concerning

[ 18 : 41 ] His blood of the covenant. He says that it was to be poured out for many. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

The blood that was poured out was not poured out for His own sin, for He had none, but for the sins of others. And the language that Jesus uses is the language of vicarious suffering. He suffers and dies for others. He suffers and dies for the many. And the echoes that are so evident from the words of the prophet Isaiah ring loud and clear. Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. So, as we eat and drink, as we eat the bread and drink the wine, this morning we say thank you to Jesus. We say thank you, Jesus, for what you did in the past. We say thank you, Jesus, for the death that you died 2,000 years ago. We say thank you, Jesus, for that blood that was shed in my place that I might know and experience forgiveness. And this is something that Jesus has done. It's a done deal, never to be repeated again. It's in the past, and it is sufficient for the present. So, we look in that direction. Well, we look to Jesus, but with that backward glance, thanking Jesus for what He has done in the past. But as I anticipated at the beginning, we also say thank you to Jesus as we participate in the Lord's Supper for what He does in the present.

Notice from the passage before us two things that we can highlight. Notice how Jesus, as He has His disciples gathered around Him, He invites them, or we might say He commands them to participate.

At the first New Covenant Passover, He invites or commands His disciples. Noted the language that He uses there in verse 26. Take and eat, this is my body. Then in the following verse concerning the wine, drink from it, all of you. Jesus extends this invitation. He extends this command to His disciples, eat, drink of what I am providing for you. And as He did so then, so He does so today. He doesn't need to die today. That doesn't need to be repeated, but the invitation that was extended on that first occasion is an invitation that is extended today. So even today, even this morning, Jesus addresses His disciples, you and me, and these words are on His lips. Take and eat, drink from it. This is something that Jesus does in the present. That's something He does now. It's something He's doing even as we've gathered here this morning. Who are invited to participate? Who indeed are commanded to participate? What does Jesus say there in verse 27 concerning the wine? Drink from it, all of you. Drink from it, all of you.

[ 22 : 26 ] Jesus doesn't contemplate that among His disciples there would be those who would drink and those who would not drink. This was inconceivable. If they were disciples of Jesus, then they would participate.

They are all invited. They are all commanded to participate, to drink from it, to drink the wine, to eat the bread. All who believe in Jesus, all who trust in Jesus are to eat and to drink, bar none. How do we respond to that invitation, indeed that command that is directed to us? So today, Jesus invites. That is something He does in the present, and we thank Him for it as we gather. But another element, and very connected, is that He invites us that He might feed us. Something that Jesus does in the present, He feeds His people. He invites us to be fed. Jonathan was already touching on that as he spoke to the children.

As we eat and as we drink, we do not only remember the past. We most certainly do. It is a remembrance supper. That is important to look back and to remember, and we do that. But we don't only remember. We are also fed in the present, in the here and now. We do not believe, for the Scriptures give us no reason to do so, that Jesus is in some way physically present in the elements, but we most assuredly do believe that He is actively present in spiritually feeding His people with the spiritual benefits of His death, of His sacrifice in our place. And as we appreciate this aspect, or even as we simply draw our minds to consider this aspect of the present feeding of Jesus, of His people, it does shed light on the matter that sometimes has more prominence than it ought to, the matter of qualifications. Who are qualified to eat and to drink?

Who are qualified to participate? Who are they? Are they the worthy? Are they the holy? No, they are the hungry. The hungry are qualified. Jesus says, look, I want to feed you. If you're hungry, then you're welcome.

Now, if you're not hungry, if you see no need of the benefits of Christ's death, if Christ's death means nothing to you and has nothing to offer to you, then certainly there would be no reason to participate.

[ 25 : 09 ] You're not hungry. But if you're hungry, if you appreciate that in Jesus Christ there is a Savior who died for you and who can provide you with forgiveness of sins and can welcome you into His family, if you are hungry, then that is the requirement. It is food that is provided. It is provided that you might be fed. What is the requirement then to participate? That you be hungry. That is sufficient qualification. And so, as we eat and as we drink this morning, we say thank you to Jesus for inviting us. And we say thank you to Jesus for feeding us. We say thank you, Jesus, for what you do for me now. But finally, we notice that the thanks that we direct to Jesus also concern what Jesus will do in the future. And in that regard, we're focusing our attention on the final verse that we have before us this morning, verse 29. Jesus continues addressing His disciples and He says, I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

Now, the language that Jesus uses is very decisive, and it actually helps us to understand just what a decisive moment this is. The language He uses presents this occasion as a pivotal moment. Something new has arrived, a new era as it were. This new covenant is being inaugurated, and a new day is dawning.

Now, that is clear from the language that He uses. But that is not all that Jesus does. He also looks ahead. He looks ahead to a future occasion. And to what future occasion does He look ahead to?

Well, He looks ahead to His return in glory. And He looks ahead specifically to how that will provide opportunity for renewing table fellowship with His disciples, where the symbols will no longer be required or appropriate. Jesus points in this verse to a future meal. Indeed, if we bring to bear, as I think we can legitimately do, the language of revelation, we can speak of Jesus looking forward to a banquet, to the wedding banquet of the Lamb, when the fruit of the vine will flow, as Jesus, together with His disciples, will renew a fellowship. And so, we thank Jesus for what He will do in the future. We thank Him that He is preparing that day for us. We thank Him that that is an occasion where we too will be present and will participate, and we eagerly anticipate being there and participating. But as we thank Jesus for that, and as we ourselves would be enthused and excited at the prospect, notice that in the language of Jesus, there is a tender or a thrilling note. And really all that I want to say by that is that this anticipated but future table fellowship that will be restored is a joyful prospect for Jesus Himself. You know, we maybe think of it and we would say, well, we will be excited or we are excited at such a prospect, and so we should be. But in the language Jesus uses, He expresses His own anticipation, His own excitement, as it were. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. There is a sense of eager anticipation in Jesus Himself for that day to come. So, we thank Jesus as we gather for what He has done in the past, for His death in our place, for what He does in the present as He invites us to participate, and as He feeds us as we do participate. But we also take a forward glance and thank Jesus for what He will do in the future and how He will gather us in that renewed table fellowship that He speaks of in His Father's kingdom. Let us, then, so thank Jesus as we participate this morning. Let us pray.