

85 Mark 14:22-25

The Lord's Supper

Text

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

A Brief History of Interpretations

It all depends on what the definition of "is" is. That statement is more or less the linchpin of the debate over this passage. When Jesus said this is my body, did he intend the "is" to function as an equals sign? Did he intend it as a metaphor?

Transubstantiation

The Roman Catholic interpretation is called transubstantiation. Now for me to even define the term is going to get very deep very quick. Since I do not believe this to be a biblical notion, I give you permission to zone out for a moment. For those who enjoy the nuances stay close as I don't intend on giving much space to this section.

Trans come from the Latin and means "across." Thus a transatlantic flight is a flight that goes across the Atlantic Ocean. So far so good. The second part of the term *substantia* means substance or essence. This touches on a philosophical notion called substance theory. The substance of something was its essence. This was different from its properties. Hence an apple is red. Red is a characteristic of the apple. It is a property or an accident. The apple could be green and still be an apple. The essence of an apple is different from its characteristics.

Ok, so putting these two terms together we have transubstantiation. It is the notion that the bread and wine actually change in substance. Specifically it is the notion that the bread turns into the actual body of Jesus, and the wine turns into the actual blood of Jesus. "Yes", the Catholics say, "it looks like bread, tastes like bread, feels like bread, and if you drop it it sounds like bread, but it is really the body of Jesus." "You see, the texture, flavor, color, those are all the accidents, the properties. Although the properties of the bread have stayed, the substance has changed into the body of Jesus." That is the Catholic view. It gets a little easier from here.

Consubstantiation

The Lutheran view is very similar. Although they object to the term, it may be conveniently labeled consubstantiation. This is the notion that the bread does not change into the body of Christ, but the body of Christ is in and through the bread. It is helpful to think of a sponge. The sponge does not change into water, but the water is found in and through the sponge.

Symbolic View

Finally, there is the view that Zwingli and most of the reformers took, namely that the bread represents the body of Christ and the wine represents the blood of Christ. There are additional nuances but I have little interest in getting involved in that. I want to preach the point of the text and these substance/accidents debates are not it. Suffice it to say that the non-symbolic views are philosophically contorted, empirically baseless, and exegetically irresponsible. For all the fuss over it, the correct interpretation is quite simple and obvious. When Jesus says that he is the vine, no one believes that he has chlorophyll coursing through his veins. When Jesus says I am the door, no one believed that his bones are cedar. It is a metaphor.

Introduction

Last week we were exposed to the Passover celebration. We spent just the briefest time looking at the various parts. The title of this week's message is the Lord's Supper. Although this is still the same meal, it is given new significance. Last week we noted that there was a time of interaction between the youngest and the eldest male of the gathering. The head of the home or gathering, usually the father, would tell about the significance of each of the elements of the meal. So when it comes to that point in the meal Jesus gives a very unexpected interpretation.

His Body

22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

The bread represents the body of Christ. That is to say it represents his physical body. One of the things that is missing from most communion services, and what was missing from our this morning, is the breaking of the bread. This is something I'd like to see if we can remedy in future communion services. It is not enough to know that the bread represents Jesus' body. So what? It is the action that completes the significance of it.

The bread is broken. His body was broken. They took him and beat him. They had whips with fragments of bone and balls of iron woven into it. The balls would bruise, and crush while the bone fragments would rip and tear.

They took a crown of thorns and pressed it onto his head. Likely these thorns pierced easily through the skin and scrapped his skull as they pressed on his head.

They took him and nailed him to a cross. Nails driven through the wrists and nails driven through the feet. A sufficient enough foot rest was provided that he could push up against the nails in his

feet in order to relax his chest to be able to breathe. Fatigue would set in and he would slump again causing his breathing to become restricted. In time they came and pierced his side. His body was broken.

His Blood

23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.

24 And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

In like manner, the wine represents his blood. His blood being poured out is saying substantially the same thing as his body being broken. It means his death. There is nothing magic in the blood of Jesus. It is not as though it would have sufficed for Jesus to come, poke his finger and give blood that way. The pouring out of one's blood was a way to communicate the giving of one's life. It is the life of Jesus that matters. It is the fact that he lived a perfect life and then poured that out.

Verse 24 communicates something new. It is not enough to know that the bread and wine represent his body and blood. Nor is it quite enough to know that the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine represented his death. At this point we can say nothing more interesting than, "That's sad." or "That's horrible." Verse 24 communicates something new. This is my blood of the covenant.

Jesus acted as our federal head. Our governors and senators and other elected officials act on our behalf. The laws they pass we must live with. The policies they push, we must live with. That is why the voting is so important. Jesus acted on our behalf, and what he did we have to live with. Fortunately, no better representative could have been chosen. In fact, there could be no other representative. He inaugurated a new covenant with his death. It wasn't some accident. His death does us no good unless, as was the case, it can effect a covenant. Without a representative, we are left to account for our sins by ourselves. Salvation can only come through a covenant relationship.

The Partaking

We have the connection with Jesus and the elements. We have his death communicated. We have that his death inaugurates a covenant. But the partaking of these elements now ties the individual to this covenant. When we believe in Jesus, we are made members of the New Covenant.

God could not simply declare us to be good and let us into heaven. He could not simply forgive and let us into heaven. God is a God of justice. With the pouring out of his blood and the breaking of his body, Jesus took upon himself the punishment due his people. He acted as a federal head. He represented us. His life, his death, his resurrection and the New Covenant do us no good if we are not a part of that saving covenant. By faith in him we are made part of his covenant people, part of those whom he represented. When we eat of the elements we act out our union with Christ.

The Gravity of Christ

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That saying is often viewed from a rather negative perspective. But it needs to be understood that that law was given as a limiting law. The tendency in punishing a criminal is to go overboard. If one of your relatives is raped, then rape in return for the criminal seems too kind. But God intended to guard against injustice even against the criminals. In essence, the punishment must fit the crime. That is its proper interpretation. But allow me if you will to balance that. If the punishment must fit the crime, then it is also a form of injustice to punish less than is required. For a murderer to get off with a mere fine is a gross injustice. It is highly insulting to the family of the victim. It is like saying, "The life of your son is worth \$100."

I have made the case before that the punishment due a crime is tied, not only to the nature of the crime, but also to the value of the being offended. Now imagine the horrible things that people have done. Imagine the infinite worth of God. Now in recompense for these sins against an infinitely worthy and honorable being, a goat is offered. "Here God, this is what you name is worth." "Here is a goat in payment for the defacing of your image." How insulting! Mind you, this is how God set it up, but we must be aware of how incredibly imbalanced that is.

It is in fact so imbalanced that those sacrifices never counted at all. They beget not one iota of merit. Hence the author of Hebrews says that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Thus Paul states in Romans 3 starting in verse 22, "For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifies of the one who has faith in Jesus." Those sacrifices could not atone for sin, thus God basically overlooked those sins.

But that is not just. God is not a good God if he overlooks sin. We would not say that a judge is good if he overlooked the offenses of the criminals that came before him. We would say, "What a corrupt and evil judge that allows the wicked to go unpunished!" Enter Jesus - the Christ, the Son of the living God. Even if God required the lives of these individuals rather than the life of a goat, that would still fall short of justice. This is not too difficult of a concept for us to grasp. My children may break something in a store and therefore be required to pay for it. But the worth of the item may be more than they can pay. This routinely happens with adults in the health arena. The medical bills may easily be more than an individual will ever be able to pay.

But what do you do when even your own life is not sufficient payment for the crime committed? Jesus, as the Son of God, was the only one who could secure redemption for us. He is the only one who could pay for our sins. I know I am taking you on a bit of a journey here, but I earnestly want you to see the weight of Christ. The Mosaic Covenant was nothing compared to the New Covenant. It was inaugurated by the blood of a bull, but the New Covenant with the blood of Christ.

If we were to hold a feast, it is common to have placeholders at the table, especially for the guest of honor. Since this is my illustration I can do what I want with it. So imagine that we can travel into the past. We are going to have as our honored guest... fill in the blank. George Washington, our first president. Issac Newton, who has left his imprint in almost every major field of science.

The man defined physics and invented calculus to help solve a problem he was having. Perhaps Plato would be our guest. It is said that the whole history of philosophy is but footnotes to the work of Plato and Aristotle. Perhaps Alexander the Great. Not only a great philosophical mind, but arguably the greatest conqueror that ever lived. You get the idea. Pick someone great. They arrive at dinner. Can you imagine someone making a fuss because Alexander the Great removed the placeholder from his seat as he sat at the table? That is what the Mosaic covenant is to Christ. He is the substance, it was the shadow. He is the glorious Son of God, it was a placeholder. No longer does the Passover carry significance. All significance has shifted to Christ. The New has replaced the Old.

Through Death, Life

Finally, Jesus is not just giving his life to free us from sin, but to bring in a whole new reality. The life we now live is not how it will always be. The life we now live is incomplete. Jesus has yet to bring his kingdom into its consummate form. R.T. France comments:

The 'cup of death' (v.24) and the 'cup' of future glory (v. 25) not only continue the Markan contrast between the present aspect of the coming of God's kingdom, hidden in rejection and suffering, and its future glory, but also link the two as part of a single purpose: it is through Jesus' imminent death *huper pollon* that the salvation will be achieved which represents the consummation of God's kingship.¹

William Lane observes that "Jesus will drink the wine "new" where in this context newness is the mark of a redeemed world."² When we take this cup and this bread we identify with Christ. We partake in his death and in his resurrection. We affirm that we are indeed in covenant with him. We are willing to suffer as he suffered, serve as he served, live as he lived. And in this celebration we look forward to a time when we will again eat with our Lord in his consummated kingdom.

Then all things will have been made new. There is a new heaven and a new earth. Sin is done away with. Death is no more. Pain is a thing of the past. No more sorrows, more tears. We will live forever in paradise. Dear Christians, it is not far off. Carl Haub has estimated that the total human population through history is on the order of 106 billion. As large as our world population is, we are only a fraction of those who have gone before us. Generations have come and gone. Dear Christian, your time is short. If those figures are correct there have been 100 billion people who have preceded us and we will soon join their number. The Psalmist was right, this life is but a breath.

C.S. Lewis described the eternal state, not as some ghostly ethereal place of existence, but as more weighty, more real, more substantive than the state we now exist in. We will live forever in an altered paradise that will make this world look like a dream in comparison to the palpable reality that we will forever enjoy. Your time is short! Make it count. Identify with Christ in his

1. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: New International Commentary on the Greek Testament*, 2nd ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 572.

2. William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text With Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, 2nd ed. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) 508

giving in his suffering, in his death, in his life in his mercy, in his love!