THE LORD’S SUPPER – Session Two

Problem with the Lord’s Supper

## Introduction

RECORD

[Martyrs]. What we are studying today is serious. It matters. At our forefathers of the faith believed about this passage was the difference between life and death. As John Piper says, ‘There are big things here that aren’t worth killing for, but are worth dying for.’

Last week we started our series with an overview of the purpose or point of each of the 7 passages that offer substantial teaching on the Lord’s Supper in the NT.

Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22 - the **Provision of the Lord’s Supper**.

Acts 2 and 20 - the **Practice of the Lord’s Supper**.

1 Corinthians 10 - the **Principle of the Lord’s Supper**.

1 Corinthians 11 17-34 – the **Problem of the Lord’s Supper**.

We delved into the Problem of the Lord’s Supper, noticing that the passage splits up into four parts.

Verses 17-22 – **A Meal Divided**

Verses 23-26 – **A Message Delivered**.

Verses 27-32 – **A Mindful Discerning**.

Verses 33-34 – **A Main Direction**.

Last week we looked at the first part, a Meal Divided, and seen in verses 17-22 that the problem in Corinth was when they were gathering together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and share in a common meal, divisions were caused in the group through the amount of food that different people had to eat. The well off, seen as the elite, the ‘real Christians’, were feasting. The less well off, were famished. They turned up every week not with a banquet but with the equivalent of a box of sandwiches, and they were going away hungry and humiliated. The problem had got so bad, that Paul tells them while they might be eating supper, it wasn’t the Lord’s Supper. Their conduct made so marred it’s character, that it was unrecognisable. That’s why Paul could not commend them. That’s why he said that their gathering together was for the worse.

Having summarised their supper and the problems with it, Paul now turns to remind them of the Lord’s Supper. Verse 20 is really the heart of the first paragraph that launches Paul into the second, ‘When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat…For I received from the Lord…’. Let us read together from verse 23.

*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that 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 also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

## A Message Delivered

In contract to what they have been doing, Paul reminds them of his source. The Lord. From the very person who provided this Supper. From the one who owns it. The one who it is all about. Not sure how it came to Paul – perhaps direct through revelation, perhaps indirect through testimony of apostles, perhaps combination of both. If you are going to guess, Peter given Mark’s gospel. Luke is similar, but travel companion.

Paul received it from the Lord and passed it on to the Corinthians. This wasn’t the first time they were hearing it. They had been told this before, he was reminding them, making them recall what he had taught them about the Lord’s Supper, probably when he was with them. In contrast to first half of ch 11 – where they are practicing something they don’t quite understand, here they are not practicing something that they should understand!

Interesting that when there was a problem in behaviour, Paul addressed belief. When the method was faulty, he tried to get them to understand the meaning. Verse 22 could quite easily role into Verse 33. Done problem solved, issue dealt with. They are now all happily sharing their supper! Paul doesn’t bother with such weak solutions. On the surface, sticky plaster, pull the rug over the division and prejudice in hearts. When Paul sees a problem, he goes for the heart and understanding. For out of our hearts and understanding comes all manner of things. The Corinthians thought that this meal was just like any other – and so they behaved in such a way. Paul needs to teach them that this meal is special, unique, it was unique in its setting, symbols and statement. It has a special meaning. Miss that, and you will fall into all kinds of errors. What we believe about the Lord’s Supper will affect how we behave at it. What we understand as the meaning, will affect our method.

Take the same approach and apply it across our life together. We ask the question, who is able to partake of the Lord’s supper. We read the narratives, the examples in Scripture yes, but what we really want to do is dive deep, get into the meaning, understand the theological significance that gives rise to the practices in Scripture. Baptism as well.

Not just our life together, but same in your own life. Got a problem – don’t settle for the easy on the surface problem. Lust and pornography – don’t just install accountability software and try to divert your eyes, get your heart sorted, get it fixed on God and delighting in God. Jealousy, understand why it is that you want a certain thing. Bitterness, don’t just smile, but dig into the root and weed it out. That’s what you do with weeds, don’t just chop off their head, you pull them out. Like a good surgeon cutting down into a body to find the problem, use the Word of God, ‘which is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart’ (Heb 4:12).

Paul pulls out it’s sword and cuts to the heart of the problem – do you remember what I received from the Lord and gave to you? And he lays it out to them over verse 23-26. Again, let’s focus on three things in these verses before us. The **Setting, Symbols** and **Statement.**

**I Setting**

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort. JRR Tolkien – The Hobbit

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. Charles Dickens – A Tale of Two Cities

Like any good story teller, Paul opens his short account of the provision of the Lord’s Supper by setting the scene. Not with focus on a hole in the ground, like Tolkien, or paradoxical statements about the age in which he lived, like Dickens, but with the short phrase ‘the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed…’.

Many of you will have read this passages over and over again, and you probably, like I do, just gloss over this introductory remark. Maybe you linger on it for a while, remember the hurt and isolation of Jesus as he is betrayed by one of his disciples. But when you stop and think about it, it is such a strange way to introduce the paragraph.

Paul clearly wanted to choose a marker to set the scene that pulled the Corinthians back into the narrative of the last supper. However, to do that, he could have chosen any number of possibilities. The night before Jesus died – to emphasise his crucifixion, the last supper Jesus spent with his disciples – to emphasise his fellowship or at the Passover meal before his sacrifice, to emphasise the shadow of Passover. But Paul choses, ‘on the night when he was betrayed’.

I find that puzzling, do you? Why focus on the betrayal of Christ? What relevance does this have for what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians? People come up with two answers: Firstly, subjective – it helps to get into the sufferings of Jesus. Secondly, stretched, in the same way that Judas betrayed Christ, so to were these Corinthians. I find neither satisfactory – and so we must consider another one. It leaves us either feeling sorry for Christ or sorry for ourselves. Was that Paul’s aim here? To make the Corinthians sorry for what they had done. If it was, he could have done so far more effectively!

The word Paul uses for betrayed here is the same on Mark uses in 14:10 ‘Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them’. It can and does mean ‘betrayed. However, Mark also uses it in a variety of other ways in different places. In the arrest of John the Baptist in 1:14, it means ‘arrested’. And in 15:1 and 15 it is used to describe the actions of the chief priests and Pilate, ‘delivering him over to Pilate’ and ‘delivering him over to be crucified’. Indeed, that’s really the basic meaning of the word. Where there is a close relationship, as with Judas, you could see it as betrayed, but with others it can be taken simply as ‘delivered up’ or ‘handed over’. Paul sets the scene by saying that it was the night when Jesus was handed over. Delivered up.

Now we have taken a step back from the narrow cul-de-sac view of looking at Judas betraying Jesus, and instead see the actions of Judas, the disciples, the chief priests, the Romans. Burt it doesn’t stop there, Scripture continues to take steps back when looking at the delivering over of Christ. Paul, in Galatians 2:20 speaks of the saviour ‘who love me and gave himself for me’. Or Ephesians 5:2 ‘Christ loved us and himself up for us’. So we see not only the giving over of Jesus by others, but Jesus giving up himself. And behing that even, we see God the father, for Paul too in Romans 8:32 declares ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all…’ and Romans 4:25 ‘Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.’ That’s why Peter can declare in Acts 2:23 on the day of Pentecost, ‘This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God’.

I’m sure you all at some point have written an essay. Goes through different phases. Planning, research, writing then submitting. Delivering it up for marking. This night, the night when Jesus was delivered over, was the culmination of the plan of redemption. A plan forged before the foundation of the world. And we stand right at the pinnacle of it. God hands him over. Christ gives himself up. Men deliver him to the cross.

What does this have to do with the problem in Corinth? Well contrast their attitude with that of God the Father and Christ. God the Father gives his son, his only son, the most precious thing there is in the universe. In the plan of our salvation he holds nothing back. Christ allows himself to be taken, gives himself up, lays down his life, for us his enemies. Though he was rich, yet he became poor for our sake, so that through his poverty we might be rich. The Grace of the Father and Son is in contrast to the Corinthian believers, who are too self-centred, greedy, selfish to hand over some of their food. They aren’t even thinking of the needs of one another, only themselves. While as Christ approached the cross, it is the needs of others that dominate his thinking, that demand his sacrifice.

On the night that when he was delivered up. Instead of feeling sorry for Christ because of his betrayal, Paul wanted them to be to be stunned at his sacrifice. And shamed at their own behaviour.

**II Symbols**

‘On the night when he was delivered up, he took bread…in the same way, he took the cup…’. The symbols is of course where all the controversy has centred over the centuries. The bread and the cup, are they simply symbols, or do they actually become the body and blood of Christ. It has been observed that this massive difference comes down to a hyphen. Protestantism says they represent, Catholicism that they re-present. That is, Protestants believe that when we take the bread and the cup nothing substantially changes within them, they are exactly the same, they just help us to think back, remember, the sacrifice that has occurred. Catholicism teaches that the bread and the cup substantial change into the body and blood of Jesus, and the sacrifice of Jesus is recreated, re-presented to the Father in the mass – hence allowing forgiveness of sins. I’m sure it is no surprise where we at BGH definitely and finally on the issue. The bread and cup are only symbols. We don’t have a great deal of time to deal with it but two clear reasons are: firstly logic. It has been well said that Christ is no more the bread and wine than he is a door or a gate – those being other things that he calls himself. Similarly, while Catholicism teaches that the bread changes into the literal body of Christ, they don’t teach that the cup become the actual new covenant. The new covenant is not a cup – despite the same language being used. Secondly, and more decisively in my mind, the re-presenting of the sacrifice of Christ, and the role of an earthly priest in that, is in complete rejection of the book of Hebrews. With Christ’s sacrifice being a once for all sacrifice, unlike those of Judaism which had to be re-done week after week. Forgiveness of sins is available because Christ our high priest died once and it is available for all who believe, not because a human priest re-presents his sacrifice.

Symbols, the bread and the cup. While Paul set the scene in verse 23, he continues to do so here. From the gospel accounts, it is clear that the last supper was in fact a Passover meal. That fact helps us to understand and interpret what took place. The bread is broken after giving thanks, this is most likely the first prayer of the Passover meal, which was a prayer of giving thanks to God for all his good gifts (although Mark records that Jesus blessed the bread as well). The cup too is located by the statement after the supper, which placed it at the end of the meal. Bread at the start, cup at the end.

**BREAD**

What does Jesus say about both. Firstly, the bread. ‘This is my body which is for you.’ Some translations will give ‘broken for you’, which could well be correct as it is contained in a number of manuscripts. In terms of the Passover, after the prayer of thanks the host would stand up and say ‘This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt’. Imagine the surprise of the disciples when Christ stands up and declares, ‘This is my body which is broken for you’. The bread of affliction become a body of affliction. The thought seems simple enough, holding out the bread, Christ identifies it with his body, breaks it to show what was about to occur to him and declares this to take place for, on behalf of, the disciples.

Or is it. That’s certainly not wrong, but as I look at this more and more, I see a different emphasis. First of all, you have the problem that Christ’s body was not broken. It was pierced, wounded, beaten but not broken. A Passover lamb, was to be without blemish. One such blemish was having a broken bone. Christ could not be broken, for that would render him an ineffective Passover lamb. That’s why when the soldier pierces his side, instead of breaking his legs, the apostle John writes in 19:36 that ‘these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken”.’ It leaves you saying something like the breaking of Jesus is really the symbolic breaking of his life under the wrath of God. Probably not wrong, but probably not the main emphasis of what Paul is saying.

I say that, because it wasn’t the main emphasis that the early church took. We noted last week that the breaking of bread became the common way of referring to the action that took place in the Lord’s Supper. At the Lord’s Supper, the gathered local church break bread together and thereby have communion – that is what we said last week. This term breaking of bread is picked up not to refer to the sacrifice of Jesus, but the participation, fellowship, communion with others. That is Paul’s emphasis in 1 Corinthains 10:16-17. The idea is that it is not the substitution, but identification and participation that is being emphasised in breaking bread.

If Joe and I were to share in this piece of bread together, how do we go about doing that? The bread has be split, broken part in order for us to share. Why did Jesus hold the bread in his hands and break it? Was it to give a visible demonstration of what was going to occur to him for them (i.e. on their behalf), symbolically, in a few hours, or was it so that his disciples could participate, share in the bread (for them, to take and share in), and hence symbolically in his body. ‘The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?’ that what Paul asks in 10:16. That body that was crucified, that body that was pierced, wounded, crushed on our behalf, that body of affliction, it is only in identification with Christ’s sacrifice that we can be saved.

I don’t say that the thought of substitution isn’t there – but that the emphasis both from the gospel accounts, Paul’s interpretation in 1 Cor 10 and the early church is on identification. Participation. Indeed, Substitution and identification often go hand in hand, the two themes are mixed together in Isaiah 53. Or in Galatians 2:20, ‘I have been crucified with Christ…the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.’

**CUP**

The second symbol is the cup. Notice that it is the body and cup, not body and blood. We will update the proposed Doctrinal Statement accordingly. The bread was probably unleavened bread, given that it was Passover. However, we aren’t told that so I don’t think we can regard it as important enough to require that only unleavened bread is used. Similarly, we aren’t explicitly told that the cup contained wine, although it probably did, instead all we are told is that it was the fruit of the vine (Luke 22:18). So again, I don’t think we can say that wine is required, grape juice would be just as fitting. And even then, these are not firm requirements. In the Philippines they have neither bread or grapes. Do they have to export flour and grape juice? Crackers and red juice are the most fitting.

In referring to the cup, and not primarily the symbolic blood contained in it, Paul very deliberately places the emphasis on the covenant that was cut at the cross, rather than the cross itself. In fact, the reference to the blood is only to point to the cost of the covenant. It is the blood of the new covenant, the new covenant made in his blood.

Covenants have often been made in blood. Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews picks the story of Exodus up in 9:19 ‘For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying ‘this is the blood for the covenant that God commanded for you’…Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.’

Christ stands up on the night he was delivered over and declares, like Moses ‘this is the blood of the covenant for you’. For, as the writer to the Hebrews in 10:4-5, ‘For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me…’. Christ was the ultimate, the great, the final sacrifice. It is his death, the shedding of his blood, that is the reason why all the blessings of the New Covenant can come to us. Read Jeremiah 31 (or Hebrews 8) to get sense of the scope of these blessings. Our new relationship with God, our forgiveness of sins, our indwelling by the Holy Spirit, that fact that we can know God, have a personal relationship with him. That is all because of Jesus. No wonder we sing ‘This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus, this is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus, O precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow, no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.’

**REMEMBER**

The last thing we need to note about the symbols, is that they are be partaken in an act of remembrance. Both of them include the words ‘in remembrance of me’.

The people of God have always been called to remember what God has done for them in the past. Think of the stones raised in the Jordan after crossing in Joshua 4 ‘these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever’. Or the passover itself, when the Israelites were asked in future generations what they were celebrating, Mosses declared in Exodus 13:8 that ‘You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes.’

But not all reminders in the OT were good ones – speaking of the day of atonement sacrifices, Hebrews 10:3 states that ‘in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year’.

Christ stands up in the middle of a memorial feast, Passover, and provides his followers with a new memorial feast, a better one. And when our children ask us…

This isn’t a reminder every year of sins, but a reminder every week of our Saviour and the salvation that he has given us.

This isn’t the only time the people of God are told to remember in the Not just recall, but respond

Care for them love them. Trust him, love him, obey him.

**III Statement**

This is where Paul is wanting to get to, the ‘for’ at the start of this paragraph indicates why he is telling us about the setting and symbols. He is trying to show that what they are doing at the Lord’s Supper is making a statement about the death of the Lord.

There is a saying that is falsely attributed to St Francis of Assisi that states, ‘Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.’ I’m not a fan. I believe in the importance of preaching, of declaring a message from God as seen in his word. That requires words. And yet, I have to admit that sometimes it does, for here Paul uses the same word he often uses for preaching, proclaiming, to refer to the action of God’s people in breaking bread and sharing the cup. They proclaim a message, make a statement. What they are doing together is making a false statement, a twisted statement about their Lord. What kind of Lord is this that has a people who acts in this way? Dividing and despising, leaving some hungry and humiliated.

This is not a proclamation that will go on forever.

Until he comes – Passover was done in preparation, with staff in their hand and sandals on their feet. They were to be ready to go This is a temporary feast, for we are a pilgrim people, passing through this world and looking forward to the next. Not just back to the Last Supper, or currently to the Lord’s Supper, but ultimately to the Lamb’s Supper, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when our faith will be sight, when our fellowship and participation with our Saviour will not only be spiritual. When we shall see him face to face, the one who we remembered here in BGH every Sunday morning. When in union and communion with him we shall step into eternity and as C S Lewis puts it, ‘the door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.’