

Review

Last Sunday, we talked about Judas' plans to betray Jesus. The news was broken at the Passover Seder, which we often refer to as the "Last Supper." "One of you will betray Me," Jesus had said. There was much more to say and do at the meal, and most of it is not recorded in the gospel of Matthew. The gospel of John tells us a lot more - five chapters' worth - beginning in chapter 13, and going through until chapter 17.

Matthew simply focused in on two things - the revelation of a betrayer, and the institution of communion. This is what we will be looking at this morning.

26:26-30 While They Were Eating

Jesus broke the unleavened bread that was at the table and gave it to the disciples. He said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then he gave them a cup of wine, saying, "Drink it - this is My blood."

This was the beginning of the practice of communion. For the next two thousand years, followers of Christ would partake of the bread and the wine just as these disciples did that Passover night. Or have they?

I think that over the last two millennia, communion has gotten very complicated. For example, the Catholic church has decreed that for communion to be received validly, the person who eats and drinks the bread and wine must have fasted since at least midnight the night before - it must be taken on an empty stomach.

But as you can see from simply reading the passage, this was certainly not the case during the first communion. Notice that Jesus and the disciples were eating the Passover supper. "While they were eating," verse 26 says, "He gave the bread to the disciples."

The first century church made this practice a part of their church potluck dinners, which were called "agape feasts" (Jude 1:12). The apostle Paul made mention of the fact that many of the Corinthians were stuffed full of food and drunk from wine before they had communion (1Cor. 11:20-21). He actually told them, "If you're hungry, eat at home before you come for communion (1Cor. 11:34).

This Is My Body

Another difficulty that people have introduced to communion is the doctrine of "transubstantiation," or what the Catholic church calls, the "Real Presence." This is the idea that miraculously, the bread actually becomes the flesh of Christ, and the wine actually becomes His blood.

The biggest defense that people have used for this idea is what Jesus said in John 6:

John 6:48-60 **"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."** Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, **"How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"** So Jesus said to them, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."** These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, **"This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"**

The teaching was difficult - impossible to understand if taken literally. It is important to remember that this was one of seven "I am" statements Jesus made in the gospel of John:

- "I am the bread of life" (John 6)
- "I am the Light of the world" (John 8-9)

- "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10)
- "I am the good shepherd" (John 10)
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11)
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14)
- "I am the vine" (John 15)

Nobody ever says, "Jesus becomes a literal vine" or "Jesus became a literal door!" And frankly, if we take Him literally, then faith in Christ is not all that is necessary for salvation - we must also partake of communion to be saved. But Romans 10:9 doesn't say, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, AND PARTAKE OF COMMUNION you will be saved." (Not to mention, that in context, he was not talking about the unleavened bread of Passover here, He was talking about the manna in the wilderness!)

So, we cannot accept that Jesus was saying to the disciples, "When you eat this bread and drink this wine, it will become my literal flesh and blood."

There are a number of different ways to diffuse this mistaken doctrine:

- First of all, the most obvious way to make this clear is that Jesus said, **Luke 22:19 ...“This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”**

1Cor. 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

The point Jesus was making was that this was something to do to remind ourselves of His sacrifice. He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," not, "Do this in consumption of Me"

- Secondly, the disciples didn't take Him literally that evening. He wasn't bleeding, and He wasn't cutting off parts of His body. They took it in the same way that a soldier's wife would take it if her husband, about to be shipped overseas, gave her a diamond necklace saying, "This is my heart. Wear this to remember me." Would she think, "Oh yuck! This is your actual heart?! How are you still alive?!"

- Over the years, many have done tests on the bread and wine after consumption, and have proven that it does not change from bread to

flesh, or from wine to blood.

- The consumption of blood was forbidden in God's Law (Deut. 12:23), and even before. Noah was told,

Gen. 9:4 "...you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood."

- God's Law also said that to eat human flesh was a curse, not a blessing (Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53; Jer. 19:9; Zech. 11:9; etc.).

And so communion is in remembrance of Jesus, not in actual consumption of Him. It is in remembrance of His body being broken, and His blood being poured out - all so that we could receive forgiveness of our sins.

That's why the Apostle Paul said,

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The Bread

And the bread and cup are perfect reminders to us of these things.

The bread is certainly a wonderful representation of His body. As you look at this bread, which we call MAT-zoh, you will notice some striking similarities to Christ.

- First, it is unleavened. Biblically, leaven is a symbol of sin. Jesus was unleavened as well - He was sinless.

- Next, it is scarred and striped by the fire. Jesus, too, was scarred and striped by the fire of God's judgment upon all of sin.

- It has also been pierced through with holes. Jesus, also, was punctured by the nails and the spear.

- Lastly, the bread was broken. Jesus' body too, was broken for our sin.

So even though the bread does not actually become the flesh of Christ, it is a very accurate representation of it.

The Cup

The cup is an equally good reminder of the blood of Christ. Under the old covenant, it was the blood of sacrificial animals that covered people's sins. But because people continued to sin, and the blood only cov-

ered, not erased sin, more and more animals had to be sacrificed.

But under this new covenant, with Jesus as our sacrifice,

Rom. 6:10 ...the death that He died, He died to sin once for all

1Tim. 2:6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all...

**Heb. 10:10 ...we have been sanctified through the offering of
the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

**Heb. 10:12 ,...having offered one sacrifice for sins for all
time...**

And so when we have communion, we are not offering yet another sacrifice, but simply remembering the one sacrifice which was made.