

TABLE TALKS

**Remarks
For Those Who Preside
At The
Lord's Supper**

**by
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2022

RATIONALE FOR WRITING “TABLE TALKS”

The Communion is a vital part of Sunday worship. Those who partake need to be prepared. Though the ultimate responsibility lies with the participants, the person presiding can certainly set the tone.

The following “Table Talks” are written for those who lead the Communion service. They will help the presider officiate at the table.

“Table Talks” are short exhortations focused on the sacrifice of Calvary. Each entry is roughly 230 words (that takes about two minutes to read). All of them are based on Scripture. They are reproduced in “large print” to make them easier to see.

“Table Talks” do not settle the arguments that have been raised in the past. Sincere souls have discussed this-and-that about the supper. “Table Talks” do not indulge in those debates. Indeed, I am not interested in raising any “issues.” My sole concern is to assist my brothers and sisters in participating appropriately in the Communion.

Since members of the church have taken the supper before, they need to renew their understanding of what they are doing. They need to refresh their memories of Golgotha and reaffirm their commitment to the One who saved them.

It is those ideas that moved me to think of “Table Talks,” that provided the reason for writing this book. I need these reminders as much as anyone. I wrote them for me as much as for you. I share them because we both want to partake in a worthy manner.

Each “Table Talk” contains references to Scripture. These references are included so that the presider can read the passages before officiating at the table. However, during the Communion service:

- . DO NOT READ THE UNDERLINED BOOK-CHAPTER- AND-VERSE CITATIONS.
- . Be sure to read slowly.
- . Emphasize key words and important questions.
- . Allow the “*Let us*” statements suggest topics for prayer.

In the following “talks,” my words are few. My sentences are simple. My thoughts are based on the Bible. My intentions are holy. I share them to glorify God and benefit believers.

Ed Mathews
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COMMUNION

The word “*communion*” comes from the term “fellowship.” It indicates that the Creator is in contact with His creation. We share a meal with Him around His table.

. There Was Fellowship In The Old Testament. God was with Israel. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized His presence. He led them. He heard their prayers. He responded to their needs. He was their God and they were His people. He shared with them and they shared with Him. Their communion was rich, close, and real.

. There Is Fellowship In The New Testament. Christians commune with God. We are “*called into fellowship with His Son*,” I Corinthians 1:9. Our initial union with Him is established in baptism. We die with Christ so that we can live with Christ, Romans 6:8. Indeed, we no longer live, but He lives in us, Galatians 2:20. The Supper of the Lord is a reminder of this wonderful union.

We identify our life with His life. We believe in His hopes. We participate in His mission. We share in His sufferings. We enjoy His companionship. We partake of His supper.

As we eat and drink, we must keep in mind that He is ours and we are His. Our fellowship is close. It is authentic. It is personal.

Let us commune with the Lord.

LORD'S SUPPER

The words “Lord’s Supper” are found only once in the Bible, I Corinthians 11:20. The term “*supper*” was common in the first century. It referred to pagan meals dedicated to idol gods. This heathen connection may explain why the early Christians avoided calling the Communion “*the supper of the Lord*.”

The ancient church—especially Gentile congregations—had “love feasts.” The Lord’s Supper was often observed during these fellowship meals. Indeed, it may be the backdrop for the remarks of Paul in First Corinthians 11.

. The Communion Was Connected To Love Feasts. It appears that the Corinthian congregation may have mixed pagan customs with Christian worship. This led to the humiliation of the poorer saints, I Corinthians 1:20-22.

. The Communion Was Separated From Love Feasts. By the second century, the two meals were eaten separately. The love feast was finally abandoned. Pagan associations were avoided. A thanksgiving for Jesus’ sacrifice took center stage.

The bread and the juice became the focus. The cross was remembered. Fellowship with Christ was emphasized.

We take the Communion to worship the Lord. We do it to express our bond of brotherhood with each other.

Let the family of God eat this sacred meal.

EUCHARIST

The Communion is often called the Eucharist. This name for the Supper of the Lord first occurred in the second century. The term Eucharist means "*thanksgiving*."

Some churches still call the holy supper the Eucharist. Others do not. It is a matter of individual choice.

There is no reference in the Bible to the Communion being called the Eucharist. However, Paul may have alluded to it in his discussion of tongues-speaking. "*How can one . . . say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying,*" I Corinthians 14:16.

Jesus took the bread. He "*gave thanks*." He took the cup and also "*gave thanks*," Matthew 26:26,27; I Corinthians 11:23-25.

Thanksgiving is a major element in our life, Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 3:17; I Timothy 2:1. It is central to the Communion service.

We are thankful for His grace, for His sacrifice, for His redemption. We are indebted to Him. We appreciate His gift. His generosity defies understanding. Thank you, Lord!

Let us express our gratitude.

HE WAS GOD

The thought of Jesus being God is a challenging idea. Many of His contemporaries refused to accept the notion. Yet it was a favorite theme for the apostle Paul. He told us that Christ “*in His very nature*” was God, Philippians 2:6.

The Lord was one in essence with the Father, John 14:8,9. Before His incarnation, He was God. His original, innate, and intrinsic being was divine, John 1:1.

Christ did not wish to be God. He did not hope to be God. He was God. He did not steal His deity. He did not buy His divinity. He was always God. And, then, He was sent to be a sin offering for man, Romans 8:3.

Like a bird is a bird, an animal is an animal, a fish is a fish, or a human is a human, so God is God. He was who He was. Before He was planted in the womb of Mary, and after He ascended back to heaven, Jesus was (and is) deity.

Heaven knows Him as God. Earth saw Him as man. Christians realize He is the God-man. In other words, while here, He was God dressed in human skin, Hebrews 1:3a; cf. I John 5:20.

This is the One we worship today, the One we honor in this Communion service. “*He who was rich became poor so that we could be rich*,” II Corinthians 8:9. He left heaven so that we could go to heaven. He left eternity so that we could have eternal life. This is the God we love. It is the God we remember today.

Let us give thanks for the God-man.

HE WAS EQUAL WITH GOD

The Lord's Supper acknowledges the deity of Jesus. He was equal with the Father. He laid aside His crown in order to carry a cross. Jesus stepped down from His throne so that we could inherit a throne. He left heaven so that we could go to heaven.

Communion should begin with His deity. He was equal with the Most High God. The supper has no significance if Christ was merely another human being. It has no meaning if He was no more than we are.

He did not consider His deity something to be "*grasped*," that is, something "*to be held on to*," Philippians 2:6. So He let it loose. He became like us. I cannot fully understand what He did. Happily, I am not required to. I am only required to believe it!

Jesus could have stayed in heaven. But He came to earth. He became like me (so I could become like Him). I am thankful He did. I remember His sacrifice so that I can live a sacrificial life.

Someday I will see His equality with the Father. For now, through the eye of faith, I can only imagine it. Soon it will be a known fact. Though, for a little while, the best I can do is believe. But I am sure of what I do not see, Hebrews 11:1. My faith will not be disappointed. The Son of God was fully God.

Let us worship Him who was, who is, and who is to come.

HE MADE HIMSELF NOTHING

Jesus emptied Himself of His deity. Literally, the word “*empty*” means “pour.” In human terms, Christ poured out His deity. Like a person pours out the contents of a container, so the Lord gave up being God. In short, He abandoned what He was.

He did not spill His deity. He willingly laid it aside. He volunteered to give it up. He abandoned His place beside the Father in order to stand among us.

Christ left His throne to become a carpenter. He took off His crown so He could make furniture. He left the golden streets to walk the dusty trails. The Lord vacated power to accept weakness. He laid aside the purity of heaven to redeem sinners on earth. He stepped out of eternity into time.

The height from which He descended is the measure of the distance He came. He left His palace in order to be born in a barn. He bent down further than we ever will. He made Himself “*nothing*,” Philippians 2:7.

Today, around this table, we should bow in humble thanks for His sacrifice. We must abandon “*selfish ambition*,” and “*vain conceit*,” Philippians 2:3. We should focus on Him who left heaven so that we can go to heaven. Our goal is to leave behind our physical stuff so that we can gain eternal glory.

Let us appreciate how much He did for us.

He Became A Servant

Jesus suspended His right to be God so that He could become man. He who was once a king became a slave. Instead of giving commands, He kept commands. His obedience was not pretense. Jesus actually became a servant.

The key word is “*became*.” It refers to a temporary position. It describes a condition that was real (but not permanent). Jesus became a servant for a while. His humanity on earth was like a coat for a season. He was really the King of kings. But He became a slave for a short time.

We must quit being so self-absorbed. We are not God. We never will be God. We must act like Jesus—giving others priority, looking to their interests before our own, condescending so we can lift them up, Philippians 2:4. Christ was a servant, Matthew 20:27,28. We should be, too.

In Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrated His servant nature. He said to His Father, “*Not what I want but what You want*,” Mark 14:36.

The Lord’s Supper is Jesus’ servant hood on display. He gave His body and His blood for us. He yielded to the will of heaven. He left an example for us to follow.

He served. He asks us to serve. We partake to be empowered to do what He did.

Let us become a servant.

He Was Made In Human Likeness

The preexistence of Christ is a mystery. I do not fully comprehend it. It involves God becoming man. It requires a virgin birth. Though I cannot explain it, I believe it.

God became like us. He remained God while He was man. He was our Master while He was our servant. He who “*had no sin*” was “*made to be sin*” for our sake, II Corinthians 5:21.

He was like us. He gave up the riches of heaven in order to share in the poverty of earth. He borrowed a manger to have a bed, a boat for a pulpit, a lunch to feed the hungry, a donkey to ride, a room to take communion, and a tomb for His burial.

If He was God, how could He be man? How could He get sleepy? How could He be tired? How could He become hungry and thirsty? Yet He was all of those things. However, if He was fully man, how could He be fully God?

Somehow He was both God and man! He temporarily laid aside the prerogatives of deity—like He “took off” His coat to wash the disciples’ feet, John 13:4. He put His deity back on when He returned to heaven—like He “*put back on*” His coat after the foot washing, John 13:12.

Of course, there is more to it than that. The incarnation is beyond my imagination. But, thank God, it is also the greatest truth ever revealed. He was like me. He experienced living on earth. He knows what it is like to be human, Hebrews 4:15.

Let us give thanks for His incarnation.

HE LOOKED HUMAN

We have no photos of Christ. Artists often paint Him with a halo, a shiny white robe, and a handsome face. But, in truth, we have no idea how He actually looked.

Paul, who had seen Jesus, simply said He appeared “*as a man*,” Philippians 2:8a. Literally, the apostle wrote, “*He was found in the fashion of a man*.” The word “*found*” refers to His “being on earth.” The term “*fashion*” means “a form which changes.” In other words, He was as I am.

Christ blended in with the crowd. “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him*,” Isaiah 53:2b.

People in the first century saw the exterior of a human. They were unable to view His inner substance. That is to say, His deity was not readily apparent. Those who saw Him saw a man. Few looked beyond the man to get a glimpse of God.

Jesus ate human food. He spoke a human language. He was as human as the neighbor next door. He died like a man but came out of the grave like God. He appeared and disappeared. He went through closed doors. He ascended to heaven. He was unique—God and man at the same time.

This is what we celebrate today. He was far more than what meets the eye. He was man for a season. His is God forever.

Let us focus on His one-of-a-kind nature.

He Humbled Himself

The preexistence of the Messiah is vividly revealed. He was God yet He became man. No one can completely explain that. But I gladly thank Him for it.

“He humbled Himself,” Philippians 2:8b. He laid aside His deity. He gave up His power. He emptied Himself. Christ stepped down. He left heaven. He lost everything. And, remarkably, He did all of that (and more) to rescue us.

We are to be *“like-minded.”* We are to have that *“same love”* for one another, Philippians 2:2. His example should be our ambition. The incarnation is a model of Christian behavior.

He asked us to be humble—to refuse titles of honor and positions of privilege. He taught us to serve. We are to *“pour contempt on all our pride.”* And, if we boast, let us boast in our *“weakness,”* II Corinthians 11:30.

The Lord came down. He not only became like us, He became a sacrifice for us. The bread represents the body He gave. The fruit of the vine represents the blood He shed. He did more than work miracles. He saved souls.

From the throne of God to the grave of man, He humbled Himself. His humiliation was the grandest gift ever given. It was the greatest example ever lived.

The Supper of the Lord is a reminder *“to follow in His footsteps,”* I Peter 2:21.

Let us be humble like He was humble.

HE BECAME OBEDIENT

When Jesus left heaven, He became a servant. Instead of telling God what to do, He did what He was told to do. He did not please Himself but obeyed the One who sent Him, John 5:30c.

Our Lord was not bullied into submission. He was not forced into compliance. "*He became obedient,*" Philippians 2:8c. He lowered Himself. He volunteered to submit. On His own, Christ chose to put Himself under the authority of the Father.

In effect, our Savior defined obedience. He did not pick-and-choose what He wanted to do. He did everything God told Him to do—which included Calvary.

The obedience of our Lord is the defining description of a Christian. I do what I am told. I submit to God. I conform to His "*teaching,*" Romans 6:17.

Obedience is the foundation of my choice. I must obey God rather than man, Acts 4:19; 5:29. I submit to authority, Hebrews 13:17. I intend to be obedient as Christ was obedient.

He denied Himself. He renounced His position. He became a servant. His self-emptying leads me to seek the interests of others, Philippians 2:4.

The bread and the fruit of the vine are symbols of His submission. He went to the cross because He was asked to go. I obey because I am asked to obey. I want to follow in His footsteps.

Let us pray for the spirit of obedience.

HE DIED ON A CROSS

The cross was an instrument of execution. It had no other purpose. It was an awful way to die. Though repeatedly declared innocent, Jesus was crucified, Philippians 2:8d.

The word “cross” refers to an upright stake or pole. It was sometimes called a “tree.” Often, but not always, a horizontal beam was attached to it. Generally, the victim was forced to carry the beam to the place of his death.

To the Jews, the cross was a “*stumbling block*.” To the Gentiles, it was “*foolishness*,” 1 Corinthians 1:23. The cross was offensive. It was scandalous. It became a reason for persecuting Christians, Galatians 6:12b.

Notwithstanding, the cross is the paradox of our faith. Jesus died on a cross for our salvation, Ephesians 2:16. His blood is the basis of our hope, Colossians 1:19,20. Thus, we boast in nothing except the cross of Christ, Galatians 6:14. For all its unpleasantness, that tree is a symbol of what we stand for.

The cross is far more than a piece of jewelry. It is the token of our belief, the reason for eating this supper.

I believe in the cross. I take these emblems to declare my faith. I partake of them to demonstrate my trust in the body and blood of Jesus. I eat this bread and drink this juice to show forth His death until He returns.

Let us focus on the cross.

GOD EXALTED HIM

“Exalt” means to “glorify” or “honor.” After His death at Golgotha, God honored Jesus. He placed Him at His right hand as a co-king. The crucified One now has *“all authority in heaven and on earth,”* Matthew 28:18.

The exaltation of Christ has a dual significance.

1. Jesus Is Glorious. He was called the *“Lord of Glory,”* I Corinthians 2:8. Though “glory” indicated His external appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, it also refers to His internal qualities. The Lord is majestic on the outside and magnificent on the inside.

2. We Glorify Him. Because Christ was glorified, we honor Him, I Timothy 1:17. The Christian lives to exalt his Savior. Christ made the glory of God visible to us, II Corinthians 4:6. He was the perfection of God in human form. He is worthy of all our praise and honor.

The Communion honors our glorious Redeemer. He bought our pardon. He paid the price. Our sin is washed away. We have been raised to walk in newness of life. He asked us to follow Him.

What we do today, honors His suffering. The Lord’s Supper glorifies Jesus.

Let us bow our heads and praise the Lord.

GOD GAVE HIM A NAME

In the thinking of the ancient world, nothing existed until it had a name, Ecclesiastes 6:10a. Hence, creation was not complete until all creatures were named, Genesis 2:18-20a.

Moreover, personal existence did not continue after death—unless the name of the deceased is perpetuated by the living. Therefore, it was tragic for your name to be “cut off,” Job 18:17.

. Your Name Reveals Your Personality. Jacob meant “deceiver.” Esau said he was “*rightly named*,” Genesis 27:36. Abigail excused the stupidity of her husband because his name meant “fool,” I Samuel 25:25. And Mary named her baby “Jesus” (which means one who saves). Why? “*He saved His people from their sins*,” Matthew 1:21.

. Your Name Indicates Your Reputation. The builders of the Tower of Babel wanted “*to make a name for themselves*,” Genesis 11:4. God made the name of Abraham “*great*.” The name of David “*became well known*,” I Samuel 18:30. Hence, a good reputation was priceless, Proverbs 22:1.

God gave Jesus a name “*that is above every name*,” Philippians 2:9b. We believe in that name. We are baptized in that name. We take the Lord’s Supper because of that name. We are willing to die for that name.

His name tells us who He is. The bread and the wine are symbolic of who He was and the essence of what He did.

Let us worship His priceless name.

EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW

The story of Jesus does not end at Calvary. He who came from heaven went back to heaven. He who stepped down from the throne is now on the throne again. He deserves our worship.

God said to Babylon. *"Before Me every knee will bow,"* Isaiah 45:23. In other words, Jehovah was sovereign. Paul applied that saying to Christ. *"At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow,"* Philippians 2:10a.

He who was crucified wears a crown. *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise,"* Revelation 5:12.

Caesar demanded that his subjects call him "Lord." But lord Caesar will bow to Lord Jesus! He who claimed to be divine will worship the One who is divine.

The majesty of Christ will overwhelm everyone. Those who are reluctant to bow will willingly fall on their knees. His power will melt their resistance. In humility, they will submit.

His name cast out demons. His name healed the sick and raised the dead. His name subdues the doubter and captivates the Christian. He will conquer until everything is placed under His footstool.

"To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever," Revelation 5:13.

Let us honor the King of kings.

IN HEAVEN, ON EARTH, AND UNDER THE EARTH

The majesty of Christ is universal. Our Messiah is not a local deity, a tribal god, or a regional phenomenon. Everyone everywhere will bow to Him: the angels in heaven, the people on earth, and the dead under the earth, Philippians 2:10b.

The enduring sovereignty of Jesus does not depend on the praise of humans or the acknowledgement of nations. What Christ accomplished on the cross surpasses anything anyone will ever do. There is no other name "*by which we must be saved*," Acts 4:12.

Religions make claims. Idols require worship. Rulers issue promises. But they will all be embarrassed. They will all come to nothing. In the end, only He who bears our scars will stand supreme.

Within days after Christ returned to heaven, the saints began to call Him "*Lord*," Acts 2:36. He is the Ruler of rulers, the King of kings, the Caesar of caesars, and the Chairman of chairmen.

He took the position of a servant. He became the Master of the universe. He was executed as a lowly criminal. He is exalted as the Highest of the high.

He is the One who said, "*Do this in remembrance of Me*." Today we renew our pledge of loyalty. We recommit our love to Him who is our Lord.

Let us submit to the One who sits on the throne.

EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS

Jesus is Lord. He is our Master. Those who refuse to confess now will confess later. Yes! *“Every knee will bow... every tongue will confess: ‘Jesus is Lord,’ ”* Philippians 2:10,11.

Those three words embody the essence of our faith, Romans 10:9. We confess by what we say and do. Our confession expresses the reason for His death and His resurrection, Romans 14:9. It identifies the One we love, the One we expect to come again, I Corinthians 16:22. Those three simple words describe our ultimate loyalty, I Peter 3:15. Jesus is Lord!

It is a simple confession. It is an all-inclusive admission. Theologians have tried to clarify it. Churches have attempted to limit it. Men have argued over it. But that confession stands as it is. It speaks for itself. CHRIST IS LORD. Nothing more needs to be said.

He who took the bread is the One we confess to be our Master. He who took the fruit of the vine is the One we worship as our Savior.

We have no other God. We have no other Lord. We remember Him not merely to excite our admiration but to renew our commitment. So we bow. So we confess.

Let us pray to our Lord.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD

The scheme of redemption originated with God. He is the reason for the incarnation. Jesus came because God sent Him, John 3:16,17.

The apostle Paul told the Philippians they should focus on the *"interests of others,"* Philippians 2:4b. That is what our Lord did. He came to earth so that we could go to heaven. Christ did what He did for the *"glory of God."*

The crucifixion is mentioned repeatedly in Scripture. Much of the time, those references call us to act in a similar selfless fashion. We miss the point of His death if we merely focus on how it benefits us. The main purpose of the cross was *"to bring (or present) us to God,"* Colossians 1:22; I Peter 3:18. Our forgiveness is the preparation for our entering the celestial throne room.

The death of Christ opened the door to heaven. When Jesus returns, He will take us there. And, on bended knee, we will bow before the Father. To Him be the glory!

The Lord's Supper is our reminder. It recalls what He did. It refers to what He will do. It points to where we are going. It asks us to glorify the Father.

Let us give glory the God.

HE WAS DESPISED

Jesus was “*despised*,” Isaiah 53:3a. He was looked at with contempt, treated with scorn. Christ was considered trivial and worthless. The hatred of His enemies had no limit.

The Scriptures say those who despise God are “*devious*,” Proverbs 14:2. They are to be “*cut off*” from the community of faith, Numbers 15:31. Despising the Lord is a serious sin.

We are warned not to “*show contempt for the kindness of God*,” Romans 2:4. We must not despise Him by loving money more than loving Him, Matthew 6:24. Such a condescending attitude has no place in the life of the faithful.

How can people be so thoughtless? How can they look down on the Most High? How can they trivialize the sacred? How can they despise the holy feast?

Paul warned the saints in Corinth against despising the church. They were humiliating their poor brothers and sisters during the supper of the Lord, I Corinthians 11:20.

What we do around the table should receive our full attention, our complete devotion. Eating the body and drinking the blood of the Lord deserves our reverent worship. It demands our deepest respect—for God and for each other.

Let us give the supper our undivided attention.

HE WAS REJECTED

Christ was “*despised and rejected*,” Isaiah 53:3a. He was thrown away, discarded like worthless trash. His disciples scattered. His friends left. His followers disappeared. His supporters disowned Him. Golgotha was a lonely place.

Our Lord was alone in His hour of agony. Those near Him retreated. They deserted Him. And, on the cross, He felt it keenly. Even His Father abandoned Him. “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me*,” He asked, Matthew 27:46.

At Calvary, those who knew Him, “*stood at a distance*,” Luke 23:49. They kept themselves aloof. This was not new. He had experienced rejection before, John 6:66.

Do we desert Him? When He needs us, do we turn away? Do we ignore Him? Do we act like we do not know Him?

The communion is our time to step up, to acknowledge His worth. Do we? It is an occasion for demonstrating our allegiance toward Him. Will we?

Regardless of what the world thinks, regardless of how it treats Him, we should cherish His friendship. We should affirm our faith in Him. We should publicly embrace His cause.

Jesus is our Lord. We take these emblems to remember, to declare our loyalty. Through thick and thin, He is the One who saves.

Let us claim Jesus.

A MEN OF SORROWS

Isaiah predicted the suffering of Christ. His pain was enormous. His body was disfigured beyond recognition. Indeed, He was a “*man of sorrows*,” Isaiah 53:3b.

“He came to His own but His own did not receive Him,” John 1:11. He experienced unbelievable grief. He went through unimaginable disappointment. He bore His misery and our misery, too. He suffered tremendous sadness.

The career of the Messiah was far from glorious. He wore the crown of thorns before He sat on the throne. He “*endured the cross and scorned the shame*” before He took His place at the right hand of His Father, Hebrews 12:2.

The Lord felt “*the opposition of sinners*,” Hebrews 12:3. He was despised, forsaken, and rejected. He was pierced, crushed, and cut off. His death was like the butchering of a lamb. Beyond all doubt, He felt a lot of pain.

His suffering was real. We can hardly imagine it. Actually we do not like to think about it. Though He took our sorrows, we prefer happier thoughts. But He asks us to remember.

We are to recall His pain, to keep in mind His agony. Our remembering will renew our faith.

He did so much for us. We reluctantly do so little for Him. We owe Him more than we can ever repay.

Let us remember His sorrow.

FAMILIAR WITH SUFFERING

The prophet mentioned the anguish of our Lord. Isaiah said, *"He was familiar with suffering,"* Isaiah 53:3b.

We deserve to be punished for our sin. But Jesus was innocent. Even His betrayer admitted it, Matthew 27:4. He did nothing wrong, Luke 23:41. He was *"without sin,"* Hebrews 4:15.

Nevertheless, Christ suffered for us. He endured our shame. He carried our guilt and took our punishment. He stood in our place, died on our behalf.

Suffering is common. We make bad choices. We endure the consequences. We sow the seeds of mischief and reap a harvest of hurt. It is our fault. But He took the beating for us.

We were wrong but He paid the price. He suffered our penalty. He gave His life so that we could live.

Isaiah said, *"He took up our infirmities,"* Isaiah 53:4. *"He was pierced for our transgressions,"* Isaiah 53:5a. *"He was crushed for our iniquities,"* Isaiah 53:5b. Our sins were laid on Him.

When we were lost, the Lord found us. When we were in a terrible predicament, He stepped in. God allowed Jesus to die in our place. This is what we celebrate today. It is what the bread and the juice represent.

The Communion is a humbling experience.

Let us recognize His incredible gift.

MEN HID THEIR FACES

When people saw Jesus, they hid their faces, Isaiah 53:3c. There were two reasons for this. His battered body nauseated them. And they feared to acknowledge knowing Him.

Christ was avoided. The majority kept themselves out of sight. Like Nicodemus, they concealed their friendship with Him. They accepted His cause but hid their interest. They received His benefits but refused to openly follow Him. Under the pressure of disapproval, they kept their distance.

In the end, His closest friends failed to stand by Him. They denied their relationship. They treated Him as a stranger. They scattered, John 16:32.

Judas betrayed Him. Peter rejected Him. The crowds turned away. They hid their faces!

Today, we acknowledge Him. Without shame, we admit that He is our Lord and Savior.

He took our place. He carried our sorrows. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Now we are crucified with Him. We no longer live but He lives in us.

I am not ashamed to own my Lord. I take these emblems to declare my faith. The world ignores Him. They hid their faces. But I believe. He is mine and I am His. I am proud to follow Him. I confess that I am one of His children.

Let us declare our faith.

WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT

A woman stood bent and broken near the cross. It was Mary—the mother of Jesus, John 19:25.

The events of that day defied explanation. How could she make sense of what she saw? She could barely breath. Mary quietly cried. Her son was dying. Likely, she asked, “*Why?*”

It did not appear that He had a friend. The authorities had no respect for Him. The religious scholars did not believe Him. The crowd did not stand by Him. It seemed like everyone was against Him.

He was the brunt of their jokes. He was the target of their spite. They spit on Him. They hit Him. They laughed at Him. They punched and flogged Him. He absorbed their brutality without a word of retaliation. Hate had its way. Cruelty was on display. They “*esteemed Him not,*” Isaiah 53:3c.

No one ever made the claims that He made. No one ever gave proof to substantiate such claims like He did. He was who He said He was.

He excited wonder. Many believed Him. The tomb was empty. There was complete agreement between what He said and what He did. But His contemporaries “*esteemed Him not!*”

Today we honor Him. He is our Savior. We eat this Supper as a sign of our respect and appreciation. We value who He is. We openly claim that we belong to Him.

Let us honor Christ today.

HE TOOK UP OUR INFIRMITIES

Jesus “took” or “carried” our infirmities, Isaiah 53:4a. He did more than merely suffer our penalty. He removed it.

After Jesus cast out demons, the words of Isaiah were quoted, Matthew 8:17. He brushed the demons aside. He carted them off. He swept them away. He sent them elsewhere.

On the Day of Atonement, a scapegoat was released. The goat was not guilty. Rather the animal “carried” the sins of the people away, Leviticus 16:20-22.

That was what Jesus did. Our sins were laid on Him. He was our scapegoat. Though innocent, He transported our sins to another place. He bore them on the cross—the righteous for the unrighteous, 1 Peter 3:18a.

The Jews understood this concept. They had observed the Day of Atonement for centuries. Many times they had seen the scapegoat take their sins to another place. So they had no difficulty comprehending the idea.

The Communion is a reminder of His removing our transgressions. He carried a load that was too heavy for us to bear. He was our scapegoat. He took our guilt away.

We are made holy by what He did. “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us,*” Psalms 103:12. Hallelujah!

Let us thank Him for carrying our load.

HE CARRIED OUR SORROWS

Sin puts the sinner in a prison of remorse. The Lord freed us from that dungeon. He carried our sorrows, Isaiah 53:4a.

When a Jew sinned, he was responsible to make an atonement, to offer a sacrifice for his misdeeds, Leviticus 5:17-19. The Jews were literally held “*responsible*.”

Now, under the new covenant, Christ takes our place. We are released from making a guilt offering. The Lord did it for us. He took our responsibility.

When one person takes upon himself the sufferings of another, he endures their pain. He becomes a substitute for their hurt.

Our mind is overwhelmed by such a thought. How can responsibility be transferred? How can punishment be reassigned? How can the penalty of guilt be given to an innocent Person?

Will someone sacrifice his life for a friend? Will a soldier fall on a live grenade? Will a parent give a kidney to his child? Yes! It happens every day. And it happened on Calvary over two centuries ago.

The Communion is a monument to Him who carried our sorrows. He sacrificed Himself for our transgressions. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Let us rejoice in His great gift.

STRICKEN

Jesus was “*stricken by God*,” Isaiah 53:4b. Did the Father hit His Son? Yes, figuratively! The punch from heaven was not a gentle tap, a friendly nudge. It caused deep wounds, bloody gashes, and searing pain.

Christ was stricken, beaten, and afflicted. An awful picture! A shameful scene! An embarrassing spectacle!

The Jews did not ask for mercy. The Romans gave Him none. The tyrants spared no grief. They did their worst to the One who did His best. He felt the full force of heaven’s rage.

Jesus was stricken. The Almighty did not change what would happen, Acts 2:22,23. His pain bought peace for those who were unable to appease divine justice. He died so that others could live.

Legends of human sacrifice abound. They are sweet stories of uncommon kindness. But they pale in comparison to Golgotha. He not only suffered the painful blows but also cured the sting of death.

The best response to a crucified Savior is a crucified life. “*Let us throw off every thought that hinders...and sin that entangles. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus (and) consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that we do not grow weary and lose heart*,” Hebrews 12:1-3.

Let us learn from the endurance of Christ.

SMITTEN

The prophet wrote that the Messiah was “*smitten*” by God, Isaiah 53:4c. The word occurs at least five hundred times in the Old Testament. It means “to be hit.” For instance, Balaam “beat” his donkey, Numbers 22:23,25,27. The word “*hit*” can also be translated “slap” or “punch,” Psalm 3:7.

Figuratively, God struck Israel for bowing to idol gods, I Kings 14:15. Likewise, God struck Uzzah for his irreverent touching of the ark, II Samuel 6:7. It is a serious matter to be smitten by God.

Christ was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. I understand the part the Jews had in His death. I understand the part the Romans had in His crucifixion. But I struggle to make sense of the part the Father had in His suffering.

Did God allow His punishment? Yes! Did Jesus surrender Himself to His killers? Yes! Indeed, the Father is depicted as administering the beating. Really? Where was His kindness toward His only begotten? Why did He forsake His Son? It seems so out of character!

But sin is awful. Our salvation required the giving of His body, the shedding of His blood. He was smitten so that we could be saved. That is the significance of the Supper.

Let us give thanks.

AFFLICTED

According to Isaiah, Jesus was “*stricken, smitten, and afflicted*,” Isaiah 53:4c. These three words comprise a painful parade of misery.

Jesus was “*afflicted*.” Nothing about His crucifixion was nice. He endured the worst so that we could enjoy the best.

The word “*afflicted*” describes the mistreatment of Hagar, Genesis 16:6, the pain of Joseph, Psalm 105:18, and the slavery of Israel in Egypt, Exodus 1:11-14. Embedded in the term is a feeling of humiliation, Deuteronomy 22:25-27.

The unleavened bread of the Passover was called the “bread of affliction,” Deuteronomy 16:3. It reminded Israel of her bondage. It gave them hope, Lamentations 3:19-24.

The Communion bread reminds us of His affliction. His hurt gives us hope. His love redeems us. His compassions never fail. Therefore, I will trust in Him.

I take this bread—the loaf of affliction—to remember what He did for me. Life on earth is born in pain. Life in heaven is possible because of pain. Affliction is part of life—both here and hereafter.

He loved you and me. He was afflicted so that we could be saved.

Let us remember.

PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS

The word “pierced” is also translated “wounded,” Isaiah 53:5a. Of the eighty-seven times the Hebrew word is found in the Old Testament, the wound is always fatal.

Thus, Jesus “*died for our sins*,” Romans 5:6-8; I Peter 3:18. It sounds utterly incredible. Would Christ really do that for us? Should we expect Him to lay down His life for sinners like us? Can we count on that being true?

Yes! Because of who He was, it is completely reasonable. He loved. He pitied. He gave. He put others first. It was just like Him to sacrifice His life for us.

People are constantly bearing the burdens of others. It is common for strangers to offer a helping hand. Would Christ act any differently? Relatives certainly help relatives. Parents endure the hurt of their kids. Why? They love them. And Jesus loved us. It is not unrealistic to think He was “*pierced for our transgressions*.”

“If we who are evil, know how to give good gifts, how much more will our Father in heaven give us good gifts,” Matthew 7:11. If we can be nice to others, surely He can be nice to us.

That is the basis for taking these emblems. His body and His blood were freely given. An incredible gift! An unbelievably thoughtful gesture! He gave what we did not deserve. He gave because He wanted to. It is His nature to be like that. He did it without thinking twice.

Let us thank Him for His love.

CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES

The prophet predicted that our Savior would be “*crushed*” Isaiah 53:5b. The King James Version translates the word “bruised.” But His wounds were much more than bruises. Jesus was killed. He was executed. He died.

In the Bible, only humans are crushed. And only God does the crushing, Job 34:25. The Hebrew term emphasized the emotional suffering of the victim. Perhaps, the prophet had in mind Jesus’ blood drops of sweat in Gethsemane, Luke 22:44.

The agony of Christ was described in graphic terms. “*He carried our sorrows.*” He was “*punched,*” “*hit,*” and “*humiliated.*” He suffered pain to take away our affliction. He took our hurt so that we could enjoy healing. He did it for you and me.

Jesus was our sin offering. “*It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin,*” Hebrews 10:4. It is impossible for a sinful man to die for sinful men. Only He who needed no intercessor could intercede for us. Only a Good Shepherd would lay down His life for His sheep, John 10:11. Or, as Peter said, “*He bore our sins in His body on the tree,*” 1 Peter 2:24.

Our Lord was “*crushed for our iniquities.*” His death paid our ransom. Sin is often viewed as human weakness (which some assume can be overlooked). God sees sin as an atrocious error (that requires the death penalty).

Let us honor the Lamb of God.

PUNISHMENT

Isaiah wrote, "*The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,*" Isaiah 53:5c. The word "*punishment*" literally means "discipline," Proverbs 22:15. God can and does discipline His people. Consider the punishment of the Lord. Remember what He did to Pharaoh in Egypt and what He did to Israel in the wilderness.

The discipline of Jehovah tests our hearts to see whether we will keep His commandments, Deuteronomy 8:2. As a father disciplines his son, so God disciplines us, Hebrews 12:7-9. His discipline is proof that we are His children.

All such discipline becomes futile if it is resisted, Jeremiah 2:30a; 5:3; 7:28; 17:23; 32:33. The punishment that brought us peace was put on Him. He did not resist.

How can "punishment" be transferred? How can His suffering benefit us? The thought of His sacrifice on our behalf changes our attitude. It mellows our stubborn will.

The crucifixion moves us to crucify ourselves. What He did for us leads us to do for Him. The rebel surrenders to His Sovereign Lord. The weak gain strength from the Almighty. The enemy of God rushes to make peace with His Judge.

So He asks us to remember Him. Remember His body that was given. Remember His blood that was shed. Remember so that we will do for Him what He did for us.

Let us remember because He remembered us.

BY HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED

His wounds healed us, Isaiah 53:5d. How could that be? In the same way, *"He was pierced for our transgressions, Isaiah 53:5a.* Indeed, in the same way, *"He was crushed for our iniquities,"* Isaiah 53:5b. He took our place. He suffered our penalty.

Two ideas are woven together. Consider Moses. He was willing to suffer for Israel. He said to God: *"Please! Forgive their sins. But, if not, then, blot me out," Exodus 32:32.* Obviously he was willing to be their substitute. And, later, Moses said, *"The Lord was angry with me"* (because of the sin of Israel), Deuteronomy 3:26. He was their scapegoat.

In like manner, Jesus is our substitute and scapegoat. There is no use asking how it is possible or how it works. It is not a matter of explanation but an issue of believing.

We know we cannot heal ourselves. Without a redeemer, we are doomed. The Lord *"was delivered to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"* Romans 4:25. Christ was sacrificed in order to take away our sins, Hebrews 9:28. He *"died...the righteous for the unrighteous,"* I Peter 3:18.

He who had no sin took our sin upon Himself. He carried them to Calvary. He suffered our punishment. He was our substitute and scapegoat. And, through Him, we are healed.

God supplied the solution to a problem we could not solve. He sent His Son to take our place, to deal with our guilt. This is what we believe. This is what we celebrate.

Let us put our trust in Him.

WE HAVE ALL GONE ASTRAY

We had a part in sending the Lord to Calvary. For we have all gone “*astray*,” Isaiah 53:6a.

The word “*astray*” means to “wander” as one would aimlessly walk in the desert, cf. Genesis 21:14. People can also wander spiritually. Israel did, Psalms 95:10. We do, too!

. What Did We Leave? We left God. We left our Father, our Guide, and our Friend. We left everything worthwhile—His presence, His mercy, and His grace. We left. We walked away from Him who begged us to stay.

. Where Did We Go? “*We turned to our own way,*” Isaiah 53:6b. We did our own thing. We avoided His will. We took our own path, fulfilled our own desires. We ignored God.

. Why Did We Depart? We were stubborn, silly, and ignorant. We thought we knew better. We had to learn the hard way. What in the world were we thinking?

. Who Rescued Us? In spite of our foolishness, God laid our sins on His Son. He paid the penalty for our mistakes. He gave us a gift. We must unwrap it.

Going astray is one thing. It seems so human, so automatic. Receiving His gift is another matter. It requires a conscious effort. Gifts do not unwrap themselves! Likewise, the Communion is not automatic. We must make a conscious effort to remember, to celebrate, and to proclaim.

Let us be mindful as we partake of the emblems.

LIKE SHEEP

The Bible says we are *“like sheep,”* Isaiah 53:6a. We simply wandered off. We aimlessly go astray, Psalms 119:176.

Sheep are constantly in need of oversight, Numbers 27:15-17. As followers of God, we are sheep among hungry wolves. Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Hebrews 13:20.

When we wander away, we become food for the wild animals. But our sovereign Lord will rescue us (if we want to be rescued).

He will lead us to good pasture. *“I will be the shepherd of My sheep,”* the Lord said. *“I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the cripples and strengthen the weak,”* Ezekiel 34:15,16. This is what God did for Israel. It is what He will do for us.

Why? He is the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for His sheep, John 10:11.

Christ is the mirror in which we see our sins. He reminds us of our wanderings, our wounds, and our need for rescue. He, as a shepherd, redeemed us. We were lost. He found us. We made bad choices. He forgave them.

Now it is our turn—to thank our Shepherd, to honor His great name. That is why we take the bread and fruit of the vine. We praise our Lord—the Shepherd of His sheep.

Let us rejoice in His gentle rescue.

OUR OWN WAY

Isaiah says humans have gone their own way, Isaiah 53:6b. The term “way” refers to our “behavior” or “actions,” Psalm 1:6. The way of the Lord is much better. Hence, we are urged to forsake our way, Isaiah 55:7-9.

What way have we gone?

. Sometimes we wander in paths of quiet rebellion. We consciously turn our back on His advice. We snub His encouragement, turn a deaf ear to His counsel. We act like the Creator has no right to butt into our business.

. At other times we follow the way of neglect. We merely do not care. We may live in thoughtless disregard for His will. Or we may move ahead in conscious disobedience to His word. The result is the same. Our way is not His way.

. Often we follow the way of pretense. Our spiritual life is a matter of play-acting. Our faith is hypocrisy. We act righteous to gain the superficial approval of men. Inwardly, we are empty. It is all make-believe, two faced, and shallow.

Some wander further than others. Yet each of us is guilty of following his own way. Some fall into shameful atrocities. Others keep the proprieties of outward religion. They keep up the charade. God is not fooled.

We keep the decencies of worship: we sing the songs, we take Communion, and bow our heads in prayer. We do it our way!

Let us follow His path, walk in His way.

LAIID ON HIM

Isaiah said, God “*laid*” our sins on Christ, Isaiah 53:6c. In regard to our transgressions, we have only two choices.

. We Can Deal With Our Own Sin. Since all of us are sinners, we all face the challenge of wickedness. Humans resort to a variety of solutions. They shrug their shoulders. “*Does not everyone sin?*” they ask. Others believe “sin is no big deal.” It is how we enjoy life!

In truth, most people ignore the reality of sin altogether. Still, regardless of how we deal with our sins, we are still sinners. We see the mischief. We observe the consequences. Yet, we are unable (on our own) to wash them away.

. We Can Surrender Our Sin To Him. “*Though our sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow,*” Isaiah 1:18b. There is hope. God has laid our sin on His Son. Yes! “*He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors,*” Isaiah 53:12.

He did that. He wants to take our burden, to carry our load. He asks that we let Him. He is ready. Are we? Will we cast our burdens on Him? I Peter 5:7. He knows we cannot handle the problem ourselves. So He took it to Calvary for us.

The Communion is for those who have let Him carry their load. It is a reminder of His wonderful love. The bread represents the body He sacrificed. The juice represents the blood He shed. He gave so that we could receive.

Let us remember Him who carried our load.

DID NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH

The term “*open*” usually refers to parts of the body: to open the “eyes,” the “ears,” the “hands,” or “the mouth.” Likely, the reference to Jesus not opening His mouth referred to His “not attacking with words,” cf. Psalm 109:2.

In reality, He did open His mouth: when He as arrested, at His trial, on the way to Golgotha, and while hanging on the cross. The Lord said many things. Isaiah was simply pointing out, Christ did not defend Himself, did not lash out at those who put Him to death, Isaiah 53:7a.

. He Was Kind. It requires enormous self-control to be silent under unjust treatment. The quiet endurance of Jesus is impressive. He did not revile, did not curse, and did not condemn those who hated Him. Almost everything He said was intended to help others.

. He Was Submissive. Who is silent when they suffer (especially when they are unfairly punished)? Like an innocent lamb—being lead to the altar of sacrifice—the Lord “*opened not His mouth*.” No wonder John the Baptist called Him “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*,” John 1:29.

Without resistance, without defiance, without fighting back, our Lord was killed for you and me. He “*gave*” His body. He “*offered*” His blood. He yielded because He loved us. We should love Him the same way in return.

Let us follow His example.

THE SLAUGHTER

The scene was awful. The prophet called it a “*slaughter*,” Isaiah 53:7b. Jeremiah used the same word to depict the judgment of God on Jerusalem, Lamentations 2:21. Hence, at Calvary, Jesus was butchered like an animal.

Since that dreadful day, we have sanitized the event. We minimize the blood and pain. But it cannot be completely ignored. His crucifixion was a slaughter. We tend to focus on His submission rather than on His suffering.

. He Surrendered. There is much to learn from His yielding. Our Lord was obedient. The cup that His Father gave Him to drink He willingly swallowed for our sake. He uttered no word of resistance, no statement of hate. When He was hit, He absorbed the blow. “*If I have said something wrong, tell Me,*” He said. “*But, if I have spoken the truth, why to you strike Me?*” John 18:23.

. We Surrender. God demands the same submission from us. Like Christ, we are required to trust His wisdom: appreciate the good days and endure the painful ones. Is not the Lord in control? Must we not resign ourselves to His discipline? Does He not know best? Christ left us an example to follow. The path to heaven goes through the butcher shop!

Our work is cut out for us. To be His, we must act like Him. The Communion is a reminder—not only of His obedience but our assignment. As He gave His life, we should give our life.

Let us remember and do likewise.

SILENT

One of the primary responsibilities of a Roman governor was to keep the peace. Nothing could get him removed from office quicker than a riot. Pilate tried to reason with the crowd. He wanted to release Christ. But the Jews would have none of it.

Pilate saw that he was “*getting nowhere.*” An “*uproar was starting.*” Shouts of “*crucify Him*” filled the air. The governor caved in to their wishes, Matthew 27:24-26.

The trial of Jesus was held in five stages: before Annas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and (a second time) before Pilate. In all these courtrooms, the Lord said very little, Isaiah 53:7c. He was in total command.

. The Lord Was Calm. Christ did not raise His voice. His demeanor was His speech. Likewise, our actions are our voice. We should suffer in patience. We should stand and wait. There comes a time when speaking is ineffective. At that point, we should remain silent.

. The Lord Was Silent. When we cannot speak (or when it is unwise to talk), we should be quiet. Endurance is its own witness. Convictions can be seen when we say nothing. Humiliation in silence can open deaf ears. Sometimes we can say more when we say less.

The Communion service is one of those times. Our silence while taking the emblems speaks volumes about our convictions. It is a time to meditate.

Let us quietly remember the silence of Jesus.

WITHOUT COMPLAINT

Isaiah predicted that Christ would not open His mouth during His final hours. The prophet wrote, *“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open is mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and a sheep before her sharers is silent, so He did not open His mouth, Isaiah 53:7.*

Twice in one verse it says “HE DID NOT SAY ANYTHING.” The prophet emphasized His yielding without struggle. The idea deserves careful thought.

In the Old Testament, suffering is accompanied by confession of guilt or complaint of treatment. Our Messiah did neither. Why? He had no guilt to confess, no complaint to make. He was not suffering for His sins. He was saving us from ours. What He did, spoke for itself.

Jesus was innocent. He knew it. Christ died for us. He took our pain, suffered our punishment. He understood that. This is why He is compared to a submissive lamb, to a compliant sheep. He accepted the judgment of God uncomplainingly. He quietly obeyed His Father.

He wants us to remember. He told us to take the bread and fruit of the vine so that we will not forget. He wants us to obey God like He did. We do not take the emblems to merely recall His actions. We eat the Supper to enable us to act like Him.

In effect, when we take the Communion, God is saying that we must stop our complaining. He wants us to do as Jesus did.

Let us pledge to serve without complaint.

TAKEN AWAY

In Gethsemane, Jesus was arrested. He was “*taken away*,” Isaiah 53:8a. The words refer to being removed by force—like a criminal captured, a prisoner carted off to suffer his fate.

The image is reinforced by the words “*oppression*” and “*judgment*.” In other words, Christ was handed over to the judicial authorities for trial. His rights (under the law) were ignored. Truth was set aside, justice suspended, and fairness withheld. His trial was a pretense, a sham, and a mockery.

The passage in Isaiah is difficult to translate. Perhaps, the best rendering is: “*By force, and without justice, He was taken.*” He was led away. He was apprehended, put under arrest, taken into custody.

The world is full of injustice. The minority populations in every country know that all too well. Life is not fair. Jesus can sympathize. He has been there, done that. He suffered as a criminal though He was guilty of no crime. He was treated as a sinner though He committed no sin.

Arrogant men had their agenda. The Almighty had His plan. Crooked officials were the prosecutors. The Lord was a Redeemer. Some were intent on killing. He wanted to save. The resurrection showed who was right.

We take these emblems to remember the injustice, to acknowledge the unfairness, and to appreciate the victory. Where would we be without Him?

Let us acknowledge the unfairness of His death.

HIS DESCENDANTS

The King James Version says, “*Who shall declare his generation?*” Isaiah 53:8b. The word “*generation*” can also mean “descendants.” Likely, the prophet was referring to His “contemporaries” or the “people” of the time, cf. Genesis 6:9.

In former years, scholars assumed the passage pointed to the brevity of Jesus’ life: “*He was cut off for the land of the living*” (without any offspring). Now the consensus of opinion favors emphasizing His submission. In other words, “*who among the people of that day realized it was for their sins that He died?*”

God laid on Him the penalty of human wickedness. The reason for His crucifixion was the grace of God. Christ was tortured, humiliated, and killed for our transgressions. Though His suffering was unfair, Jesus accepted it quietly and obediently.

He was like a lamb being led to the altar of sacrifice, a sheep being sheared of its wool. He “*opened not His mouth*” during the ordeal. He allowed the punishment of His Father in order to save humankind from their sin.

Who understood what was happening on the fateful day? Did the High Priest? Did Herod? Did Pilate? Did the crowd?

No! And we would not either except—through the Bible—we have grasped some of the significance! Jesus died for you and me.

Let us tell Him of our appreciation.

CUT OFF

The Bible says Jesus was *“cut off from the land of the living,”* Isaiah 53:8c. The words *“cut off”* indicate a violent severing, I Kings 3:25. They can also indicate a separation from the protective care of God, Psalms 88:5. Generally, to be *“cut off”* meant to die, Lamentations 3:54; Ezekiel 37:11.

. We Cut Ourselves Off. People often heroically endanger themselves to serve others. A mother remains at the bedside of her sick child. Soldiers go behind enemy lines to rescue a comrade. Missionaries live in leper colonies to preach the Gospel. All of these are examples of selfless sacrifice.

. God Cut Off Christ. The Father abandoned His Son. He sacrificed Jesus to redeem us from sin. Humans, who lived during that awful day, did not understand why He was nailed to the cross. But, thank God, now we do. He died so that we can live. He gave His life so we could have eternal life.

Our Lord was *“cut off.”* He was murdered on a hill far away. He cared (though His contemporaries did not)!

This bread represents His body. This fruit of the vine represents His blood. This Supper is a simple reminder that He was *“cut off”* so that we could be *“included in.”*

We partake to remember. We eat to honor Him. We participate in order to be with Him. We abandon the mundane in order to focus on the eternal.

Let us be “cut off” so we can be “included in.”

FOR YOU AND ME

"For our transgressions, He was stricken," Isaiah 53:8d. Jesus bore our punishment. He took our sins upon Himself. He suffered in our stead.

Eight times, in five verses, the prophet Isaiah emphatically states that the suffering of Christ was for us.

- . *"Surely He took up our infirmities."*
- . *"He carried our sorrows."*
- . *"He was pierced for our transgressions."*
- . *"He was crushed for our iniquities."*
- . *"The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him."*
- . *"By His wounds, we are healed."*
- . *"The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."*
- . *"For our transgressions, He was stricken."*

Nothing could be clearer. How can it be ignored? Jesus paid the price. He came to earth to *"give His life as a ransom," Matthew 20:28*. He laid down His life for us, John 10:11. He was *"a sacrifice of atonement," Romans 3:25*. *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree," 1 Peter 2:24*.

"No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for himself," Psalms 49:7,8a. Only He who had no sin could make atonement for sinners, Hebrews 7:26.

What Christ did, He did for you and me. The bread and the wine represent His gift to those who were lost.

Let us thank Him for doing what we could not do.

BURIED LIKE A CRIMINAL

After His death, Jesus was “*assigned a grave with the wicked,*” Isaiah 53:9a. Or, as some versions say, “*He was buried like a criminal.*” He who was innocent was treated like He was guilty.

. He Suffered Contempt. He was rejected in life and disrespected in death. When insulted, He did not retaliate. When mistreated, He made no threats. “*Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly,*” 1 Peter 2:23. And, even after He died, He was not buried among friends or followers. Disbelief and dishonor was heaped on His memory. His tomb was among the wicked—the proud, the deniers of God, and the friends of the devil. Yet He who was despised among men was honored by God!

. He Received A Reward. The ridicule was horrendous. Though kind, He suffered shame. He endured so that we could be saved. It was not fair. It was not pretty. But it was necessary. The way of the cross leads home. Through His awful pain, He became our Savior. “*Future generations will hear about Him. His righteousness will be proclaimed to people yet unborn,*” Psalm 22:30,31. He purchased our pardon. And, because of Him, “*goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,*” Psalm 23:6.

Our Communion today is a token of our thanks for what He did long ago. We honor Him who was dishonored. We love Him who was hated.

Let us give thanks for the bread.

WITH THE RICH

There is ambivalence toward riches in the Bible. Wealth can be a blessing, Proverbs 10:22, or a curse, Matthew 6:24. Hence, the wise will say, “*Give me neither poverty nor riches but my daily bread,*” Proverbs 30:8.

Nevertheless, Isaiah predicted that Jesus would be buried with the rich, Isaiah 53:9b. What was his point? Two meanings are possible.

- . A Rich Man Buried Jesus. The Hebrew text says Christ would make His grave with the wicked (plural) and with the rich (singular) in His death. A popular understanding of these words refer to Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man, who put the body of the Lord in his tomb Matthew 27:57-60. Thus, the prediction of Isaiah was literally fulfilled. Christ made His grave with the rich!

- . Christ Died For Sinners. Generally, the rich were considered sinful. How could one be wealthy except through ill-gotten gain? Did not Jesus identify with sinners? Was not His crucifixion suffered for evil men? Did not God make Him (who had no sin) to be sin for us? II Corinthians 5:21. He who was sinless was killed like a criminal so that we could be righteous before God, I Peter 2:24.

Either interpretation is possible. Both of them are true. He was placed in the tomb of a rich man. And He did take our sin upon Himself. This is why we take the Supper of the Messiah.

Let us remember and be grateful.

NO VIOLENCE

In the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, the prophet repeatedly mentions the innocence of the Messiah. Then, suddenly, he focused on His cruel suffering. But, just as abruptly, Isaiah pivots back to the theme of innocence: “*He had done no violence nor was any deceit in His mouth,*” Isaiah 53:9c,d.

The Hebrew word for “*violence*” is almost always used in connection with human hatred toward other humans. For example, it was the cause of the flood, Genesis 6:11,13. And the violence of people toward other people was the means of divine judgment against Israel, Ezekiel 7:11.

Our Lord was not violent. He did not deserve punishment. Isaiah was charting new territory among Old Testament writers—the innocent dying for the guilty. God was forgiving human violence. He was transforming the sufferings of His Son into forgiveness for those who hate, Romans 5:19.

Jesus was crowned (after being killed as a criminal) because He had no sin. He did nothing wrong. He was “*holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, (and) exalted above the heavens,*” Hebrews 7:26. By His innocence, we are saved.

He was what we are not, so that we can be what He is. His body was given. His blood was shed. And, by His sacrifice—the innocent for the guilty—we have hope.

Let us pray.

NO DECEIT

It is common for humans to be deceitful. We often mislead our fellow man. We are deceitful in order to get our way. We betray, beguile, trick, double-cross, hoodwink, bamboozle, and dupe others to obtain what we want. The Scriptures condemn such treachery in no uncertain terms.

Jesus was not deceitful, Isaiah 53:9d. He not only spoke the truth, He was the Truth, John 14:1. His innocence makes Him an ideal sin offering, Hebrews 7:27 *"He who had no sin was made to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God,"* II Corinthians 5:21. Because *"He committed no sin,"* I Peter 2:22, He was sinless, I John 3:5.

Many religions claim to have saviors. But, all of those so-called redeemers are sinners. They are reckless deceivers.

Why, then, was Christ condemned as a sinner? Why did God lay on Him such awful afflictions? The reason for His suffering is found in the nature of divine judgment.

Sin must be punished. Though, without sin, Christ took upon Himself the penalty of sin. By His stripes, we are healed!

"He took our infirmities, He carried our sorrows." He was born to die. Therefore, *"He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him."* God *"laid on Him the iniquity of us all,"* Isaiah 53:4-6. Does anything else need to be said?

Let us, then, give thanks.

THE LORD WAS PLEASED

It was “*the will of God to crush the Messiah,*” Isaiah 53:10a. Really? Was the Father happy to hurt His son? Well, yes! Not because He enjoyed inflicting the pain but because the pain purchased our pardon.

Actually, the Hebrew says, “God was delighted.” The same Old Testament word describes the delight of people obeying God, Psalm 1:2, and the delight of God being obeyed by people, Isaiah 44:28.

It is in this latter sense, that God was pleased. In other words, it was His plan all along to send Jesus to Calvary. That is the focus of the Bible. The cross was the will of God before the world began, I Peter 1:20. God caused hurt in order to help, cf. Micah 6:13. The death of Christ was a sin offering. Pain was part of the process. So God was pleased.

All of this prepares us to grasp the significance of the crucifixion. Our Savior stepped in, became our substitute, laid down His life in order to redeem our life, to do the will of God that included Golgotha. “*This is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets saying that His Messiah would suffer,*” Acts 3:18.

We acknowledge that suffering in this Supper. His body was laid down and His blood was poured out—not for His sake but for our salvation. His pain brought both God and us eternal delight.

Let us offer thanks.

MADE HIS LIFE A GUILT OFFERING

Every offering in the Jewish religion had a purpose. The guilt offering was a fine imposed to repay damages inflicted on a neighbor, Leviticus 6:1-6.

God “*made*” Jesus a sacrifice for our guilt, Isaiah 53:10b. The basic idea of “*made*” was to put or place in a special position. The Lord was appointed to be our payment for the damages caused by our sins.

Christ “*gave His life as a ransom*,” Matthew 20:28. What He did, the Father did. For it was God, living in Him, who was doing His work, John 14:10c. Indeed, it was the Father who “*laid on Christ the iniquity of us all*,” Isaiah 53:6b.

Jehovah bruised Jesus. The Father put our grief on Him. The Almighty made our Lord a guilt offering. All of that was decided in the chambers of heaven before the Messiah ever set foot on earth.

Calvary was not an after thought. Crucifixion was not the judgment of men. No! Our Lord was handed over by the set purpose and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2:23. Indeed, it was the Father who made Him a guilt offering.

We stand in awe of His willingness to do for us what He did. We take these emblems in humble appreciation for removing our guilt, for making restitution for what we have done.

Let us pray.

HIS OFFSPRING

Jesus was never married. He did not have children. Yet Isaiah said, “*He would see His offspring,*” Isaiah 53:10c. How could that be?

His followers are His descendants. They trust Him as their Savior. They see Him as their spiritual parent.

Yes! We are His children. Throughout the Bible, converts were the offspring of the one who lead them to the Messiah. For instance, Paul said (to the Corinthians): “*I became your father through the Gospel,*” I Corinthians 4:15. Likewise, John called His converts “*My children,*” I John 2:1; cf. 2:12,28; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21.

Christians are called members of the family of God, Ephesians 2:19. He is our Father. The saints are His sons and daughters, II Corinthians 6:18. And the Church is His family, I Timothy 3:15. In other words, we are the posterity of God, Psalms 22:30.

Our Lord has invited us to His Supper. The table is set. The food is served. The bread and the wine are prepared. We eat and drink to remember His body and blood He sacrificed for our sake. He laid down His life for His children. That is what parents do for their kids. That is what Christ did for us.

The Eucharist tells us that we are family—His family, His children, and members of His Church.

Let us behave as His children.

PROLONG HIS DAYS

Jesus did not die in vain. Even though He was crushed, Christ had done the will of the Father. Our Savior was a guilt offering. God accepted His sacrifice. Our penalty for sin was paid. Through Him many are justified.

Therefore, “*God prolonged His days,*” Isaiah 53:10c. Long life, in the Old Testament, was a sign of divine favor. The Almighty “*prolonged*” the days of Christ. He would raise Him from the dead. God would place Him at His right hand. There He would reign forever.

This seems like a contradiction. For, Isaiah had already said, “(Christ) *was cut off from the land of the living,*” Isaiah 53:8c. Indeed, on the cross, Jesus died. But, after He sacrificed Himself, He came forth from the tomb. His life was restored. Or, as Paul wrote, “*We know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him,*” Romans 6:9.

His resurrection solved the riddle, clarified the words of the prophet. “*The death He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God,*” Romans 6:10. Indeed, Jesus is the Living One. He was dead. “*Behold, He is alive for ever and ever,*” Revelation 1:18.

We worship a living Savior—not a dead Teacher. These emblems remind us that He lives and that we will live with Him in eternity.

Let us give thanks.

THE WILL OF GOD WILL PROSPER

“Prosper” means “to accomplish what is intended.” Real prosperity is doing the will of God, II Chronicles 31:21. The devout petition the Lord to grant them success, Psalm 118:25. On the cross, Jesus purchased salvation for humanity. He fulfilled the purpose of God, Isaiah 53:10d.

Christ became the mediator of a new covenant, Hebrews 9:15; 12:24. He came to earth, was born of a virgin, and announced the Good News. He was a light to the lost and salvation for sinners. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God accomplished all this through the Lord.

His crucifixion was not a cruel mistake, an unfortunate accident. Rather, it was the intention of heaven—the pleasure of Jehovah—for Christ to lay down His life. He fulfilled (in every detail) the wishes of God. And His accomplishment was acknowledged by raising Him from the dead.

Without the din of battle, Christ became the Conqueror, the King of an invincible Kingdom, a world subduing power. He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

This bread represents the body He sacrificed. The fruit of the vine stands for the blood of the New Covenant. Together, they speak of what He accomplished during His time on earth. He left nothing undone.

Let us bow in prayer.

HE WAS SATISFIED

The word “*satisfied*” refers to being “happy” or “content.” Heaven was pleased with the outcome of Calvary. When the suffering was over, there was joy, Isaiah 53:11a.

After centuries of animal sacrifices, the Lord had had enough. “*I have had more than enough of burnt offerings*,” God said. “*I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats*,” He emphatically stated, Isaiah 1:11.

Though His pain was followed by glory, it was not the crown that gave Christ happiness. Instead, it was the realization that His sacrifice had saved the world.

- . He is satisfied that, in His name, through repentance and baptism, everyone is forgiven, Acts 2:38.

- . He is satisfied in seeing that multitudes believe in His death for their salvation.

- . He is satisfied that what He came to do was done. He rejoices in the redemption of every lost soul.

- . He is satisfied that His life restores families, refreshes societies, and saves nations.

Heaven erupts in anthems of praise at the rescue of each wayward traveler. His body and His blood deliver us from the slavery of sin. This Supper points to His joy and our happiness. It is a job well done, the joy of finishing, the fruit of His labor.

Let us share in His satisfaction.

HIS KNOWLEDGE

Isaiah said, *“By His knowledge, many will be justified,”* Isaiah 53:11c. The Lord had been in heaven. He had experienced eternity. He knew the joy of fellowship with the Father. Yes, as we say, “He had been there and done that!”

. What He Knew. Jesus knew we needed to be rescued. He knew we could not save ourselves. Christ knew where we were headed. He knew we could not find our way. He was touched by our plight, moved by our condition, upset by our sin. He knew He had to do something.

. What He Said. The Lord gave wisdom. And, *“from His mouth, came understanding,”* Proverbs 2:6. Christ told us who He was. He showed us what God was like—His nature, His feelings, and His plans. He did all of this to draw us to Himself. His efforts were not in vain.

“For, through the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also through the obedience of one man many will be made righteousness,” Romans 5:19.

The Lord wants us to refresh our memory every week. He gave us a simple meal. The bread and the fruit of the vine speak of His suffering for our salvation. What we learned from Him gave us justification before God. He knew. And we are glad He told us.

Let us praise Him for His knowledge.

HIS PORTION AMONG THE GREAT

After His death, Jesus was given “*a portion with the great,*” Isaiah 53:12a. The term “*portion*” refers to “a share of something divided” (such as booty of war or inheritance among legal heirs).

From what transpired in His trial and execution, it appears that Jesus was a common criminal. After all, He was crucified between two thieves. No respect was given! No pain was spared!

Yet, as it turned out, His “portion” was among “*the great.*” And, “*with the strong, He divided the spoils,*” Isaiah 53:12b.

In other words, what looked like utter humiliation became complete victory. The Lord rose triumphant from His grave. He ascended back to heaven. He was received with full honors in the throne room of God.

Christ was worthy because He was slain. And, with His blood, He purchased men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, Revelation 5:9. These were the words of the new song—sung when our Savior returned to His celestial home. The difference between the cross and the crown was huge. Truly, His portion was among the great—the faithful saints, the righteous martyrs, the singing angels, and the sovereign God.

It is our portion to eat this Supper with Him in His Kingdom.

Let us act like we are among the great.

POURED OUT HIS LIFE

Jesus “*poured out*” His life on the cross, Isaiah 53:12c. Sometimes people say His blood was “spilled.” But that sounds like His death was an accident. Therefore, I prefer to say, “He poured out His life intentionally.” He emptied Himself on purpose.

Christ repeated the words of Isaiah when He instituted the Supper in the upper room. He took the cup, gave thanks, and said: “*This is my blood...which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,*” Matthew 26:28.

. He Volunteered. Christ allowed His arrest. He allowed His humiliation. He allowed the nails to be driven. He could have secured the help of thousands of angels. He could have escaped the agony. But He chose to take our punishment. He poured out His soul to redeem our souls.

. He Surrendered. Jesus knew the intentions of Judas. He was aware of the plans of the authorities. He had no misgivings about the awful event. Yet He surrendered to their depraved ambitions. He gave Himself to save us. He became our model for serving others.

Christ gave everything He had so that we could receive everything we need. He held nothing back so that we could have all that is required to be saved. He poured out His life so that we could live.

Let us get ready to be poured out.

NUMBERED AMONG THE TRANSGRESSORS

The expression “*to be numbered among*” refers to being appointed or assigned a place or position. For example, a Babylonian official was “appointed” to supervise the diet of Daniel, Daniel 1:11. Likewise, Jonah was “provided” a great fish as well as a vine, worm, and scorching heat, Jonah 1:17; 4:6-8.

Obviously, the “numbering” of God suggests divine control. So, Christ, by the choice of God, was numbered with transgressors, Isaiah 53:12d.

. What Was Assumed. Since Christ was crucified with robbers, His contemporaries thought He was a thief. They charged Him with taking the title of deity, stealing the claim of Messiah. Therefore, they condemned Him as a “*blasphemer*,” Matthew 26:65. Because He was zealous, they called Him a fanatic. Because He was truthful, they labeled Him a liar.

. What Really Happened. When leaving Gethsemane, Jesus knew the words of Isaiah “*must be fulfilled*,” Luke 22:37. So, as predicted, He was numbered with sinners. But, actually, in His death, He was a conqueror—dividing the spoils of battle with the strong. Indeed, God “*highly exalted Him—gave Him a name above every name*,” Philippians 2:9.

Like Christ, we are numbered among the transgressors. He did not deserve it. We do. But, by His suffering we have been transformed. His body and His blood have purchased our redemption. This Communion helps us remember that.

Let us keep in mind those among whom we are numbered.

INTERCESSION

Christ “*made intercession*” for us, Isaiah 53:12e. He is our go-between. He has one hand on the shoulder of God and one hand on our shoulder. He bridges the gap. He negotiated the differences that separated us. He “*intervened*,” Isaiah 59:16. He made peace among those who were at odds.

. Christ Was A Liberator. He freed us from the sinister power of sin. The Lord broke the grip of wickedness on our life. He freed us from the clutches of the evil one. Now we can opt to be sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Without fear, we can climb up on His lap. For, though we were once enemies, now we are friends.

. Christ Was A Reconciler. In time past, we were alienated from God, estranged from the hope of eternal life, enemies of heaven. We were outsiders looking in. We were hostile to His encouragement, aliens to His promises, and deaf to His gracious call.

But the Lord negotiated a peace treaty. He is our “*guarantee*,” our “*mediator*” of a friendly relationship with the Creator and Judge, Hebrews 7:22; 8:6. In short, we have been rescued. Therefore, Paul wrote, “*We have one mediator between God and man—the man Jesus Christ*,” I Timothy 2:5.

We gather to partake of His Supper. We celebrate His work of intervention. We honor His success in negotiating. We rejoice in being friends with God.

Let us appreciate our Intercessor.

A UNIQUE EVENT

Jerusalem was overrun with people. There were ten times as many folks walking the narrow streets. The congestion during Passover was unavoidable. In order to prepare for the feast, the disciples were to meet a man “*carrying a water jar*,” Mark 14:13. Given the crowd, one might assume this was not much help. But, actually, it was!

Without a municipal water system, every household had to fetch their water from a public well. That is what women did. They carried the water in clay jars on top of their heads. During this holiday, a few men sold water from skin bags transported on their shoulders. Thus, a man carrying a clay jar was quite rare—almost unheard of.

And, for many, the Communion is different. It stands out from the rest of the worship service. Like the man with the water jar, it is unique, unusual, and significant.

The “water jar” man would lead the disciples to the house with the upper room. There the companions of Christ were welcome. There the disciples could prepare the sacred meal.

The Communion is where the saints gather. It is where they belong. It is where they meet with the Lord, where they eat together at His table. There the bread and wine are blessed. All believers are invited to partake.

This solemn occasion is intended to remember the sacrifice of Jesus. It is an opportunity to recommit our lives to our Master.

Let us cherish this unique time of worship.

THE GUEST ROOM

When making preparations for the Passover, the disciples located a “*guest room*,” Mark 14:14. It was on the second floor. Hence, it was called the “*upper room*,” Luke 22:12. It was a gathering space on the flat roof of a middle eastern home.

Such accommodations were common in the Mediterranean world. They were regularly used for entertaining visitors. Elijah lived in an upper room in Sidon, I Kings 17:19. Elisha often stayed in a second story chamber, II Kings 4:8-10. And Paul reserved the guest room in the house of Philemon, Philemon 22.

In each case, the guest had blessed the life of the host: supplying food, healing a child, or saving a soul. The lodging was a token of thanks in return. Likely, the upper room in Jerusalem was a similar gesture of appreciation.

We invite the Lord to this assembly. We gather as a token of our deep gratitude. He blessed our lives by giving His life as a ransom. He paid our debt we could not pay.

At this table, we are His guests. We partake of the bread and juice. They remind us of His broken body and shed blood. He purchased our pardon. Because He first loved us, we love Him in return, I John 4:19.

This room is our “upper room.” It is our “guest chamber.” We welcome Christ. We eat with Him. We honor His generosity. It is our “Thank you” for being so kind.

Let us be considerate guests.

PASSOVER LAMB

In the context of instituting the sacred Supper, the Passover Lamb is mentioned, Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7,8. Indeed, on that occasion, the attention of the disciples was focused on the Passover celebration.

A lamb was “*killed*” and “*eaten*.” The redemption from Egyptian slavery was central in the thoughts of the disciples. The Passover Lamb reminded them of that ancient rescue.

A lamb symbolized innocence. It stood for gentleness. When sacrificed, lambs did not fight back. They were meek and submissive. When speaking of the Messiah, Isaiah wrote, “*He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth,*” Isaiah 53:7. Like a lamb lead to the slaughter, He did not resist.

Consequently, when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” John 1:29. Hallelujah! The blood of the Lamb redeems us all, 1 Peter 1:18,19.

Our Lord is our Passover Lamb. He was innocent, pure, and gentle. He gave His life as a ransom. He is our Rescuer. His is our Hope.

That is what we remember today. That is where our minds should be focused. He was offered. He was killed. We eat the bread that represents His body. We drink the juice that symbolizes His blood. We rejoice. The Lamb was slain—but lives again.

Let us give thanks for the Lamb of God.

PREPARATION

It was early in the spring. Life was moving in the rhythm the past suggested. The Passover Feast was fast approaching. The disciples asked Jesus, “*Where do You want us to make preparations?*” Matthew 26:17. The list was long.

- . A proper room had to be found.
- . The place was cleaned (especially of all its yeast).
- . Cups, dishes, and couches had to be arranged.
- . Since the feast was at night, lamps must be made ready.
- . A lamb had to be bought, offered, butchered, and roasted.
- . Unleavened bread, wine, and herbs must be prepared.

In addition, the disciples had to walk to and from the city of Jerusalem—two miles each way. Obviously, a whole day was required to get ready.

How different! Our list of preparations is much shorter. Most of us do little or nothing to get ready for the Communion.

The Supper of the Lord is sandwiched between several other parts of Sunday worship. And, in most places, there is a sense of “hurry.” Those who preside are under-the-gun to move with haste. They are required to avoid taking too much time!

Minimum preparation! Minimum participation! Is Christ happy with our way of doing things? Since Jesus asked us to remember Him, I believe He is happy that we take the holy meal regularly. But, since He is not in a hurry, I wonder if He rejoices over our haste?

Let us take time to be holy.

UNTIL IT FINDS FULFILLMENT

The Passover had been celebrated for centuries. Jesus and His disciples were ready to celebrate it anew. But our Lord made a startling announcement. He would not eat it again “*until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,*” Luke 22:16. What did He mean?

The upper room became the bridge between the last Passover and the first Communion. Certainly, in hindsight, the meaning of that event was huge for both Christ and us.

. How Was It Significant To Christ? He “*eagerly*” looked forward to the occasion, Luke 22:15. He anticipated the completion of His purpose on earth. The finish line was just ahead. He was not quitting. He was not altering His assignment. He was headed to Calvary. He was ready to lay down His life. He was determined to complete His mission.

. How Is It Significant To Us? It was the last Passover. It had served its purpose. The Supper of the Lord would take its place. The kingdom was ready to come. The new covenant was in the wings. The waiting was over. The promise was fulfilled. Now we celebrate its completion. Now we eat and drink with Him in His Church.

The old is gone. The new has come. Now we partake to remember the last paschal Lamb to be slain. His body and His blood purchased our salvation. Now we eat the unleavened bread and drink the wine in His kingdom. Praise God!

Let us worship our King.

JUDAS NEGOTIATED

When others were busy preparing the Passover, Judas was planning the betrayal. He had gone to the Jewish authorities to discuss the value of committing treason, Matthew 26:15.

The sum agreed upon was the price of a slave—thirty pieces of silver. Months earlier, the Lord had said that one of the twelve was “*a devil*,” John 6:70. Judas ignored the warning.

He was determined to forsake the Master. Perhaps, he thought there was nothing to gain in being loyal. So he played the game of false devotion. He did it so well none of the other disciples noticed.

How could he think such thoughts, do such things? But, once the money exchanged hands, Judas “*watched for an opportunity to hand Him over*,” Mark 14:11b.

Are we playing the game? Are we putting on a false front—acting like His disciple when we are His betrayer? If so, like Judas, we need to dismiss ourselves. Do not stay and be a hypocrite. Do not stab Jesus in the back. Get right with God. Then come to the table.

If we play like we are sincere—merely going through the motions—does not the Lord know? Will we not meet a sorry end like the Iscariot? Communion is not a game. Christ is here. Taking the Supper does not save. Jesus does. Is He really our God? Or are we merely pretending?

Let us approach the table with a pure heart.

WASHED THEIR FEET

The Passover preparations were complete. The guests had assembled. Jesus knew the end was near, John 13:1. He made every moment count.

While the meal was “*being served*,” Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. It was usually the job of a household servant. But, when no one volunteered, Christ stepped up by stepping down. The foot washing was an answer to the argument about “*who was the greatest*.”

Had they prepared their minds for the sacred meal? It is debatable! They seemed preoccupied with themselves: Who got to sit next to Jesus? They had had this discussion before. Obviously, the issue was still unsettled. Strangely, as it turns out, John and Judas reclined on either side of the Lord.

Were the disciples prepared for the Communion? Are we like them? Do earthly issues fill our minds? Do we fret over carnal questions that rob us of spiritual benefits? If we do, we gain nothing in partaking of the bread and the wine.

As for me, I put my mind on Him who took away my sins. I fight to focus on His cross and celebrate His crown.

The emblems help keep my mind where it belongs. He served. He saved. I partake to think of Him— to remember Him and Him alone! I must keep myself out of the way. Christ belongs in the center of my thoughts.

Let us bow because He is here.

ONE OF YOU WILL BETRAY ME

The joy in the upper room was shattered. The festive scene was interrupted by a stunning announcement: “*One of you will betray Me,*” Matthew 26:21. What Jesus said startled them. The Lord was full of surprises!

It was bad enough that the Messiah was going to die. But it was unthinkable that one of them would participate in His death!

Had not Judas—like the others—left everything to follow the Lord? Matthew 29:27. Had not Jesus recruited Him? Did not Judas witness His miracles, hear His preaching, and see His kindness? Judas was the treasurer of the group! How could he be so unkind to Him who had been so nice?

Yet he was. And it is not uncommon for people to do the same today. We become disappointed like Judas. We are distracted like the Iscariot. We lose heart and become traitors to His cause. We crucify Him all over “*again,*” Hebrews 6:6.

All the disciples deserted Jesus (temporarily). They were afraid of the angry crowd. They abandoned Him. And, often, we do, too. We have heard His message. We have experienced His grace. But, sadly, we embarrass Him by our behavior.

The Communion is a call to renew our commitment. We pause to repent, to beg for His forgiveness. We chose Jesus rather than Judas. We want to be numbered among His believers. We refuse to be one of His betrayers.

Let us cling to Him (even when others crucify Him again).

VERY SAD

The announcement of the betrayal left a thick cloud of melancholy in the upper room. The disciples became “*very sad*,” Matthew 26:22. It was an awful moment packed with a disturbing question: “*Is it I?*” “*Could it be me?*” “*Am I the one?*”

. Who Was The Traitor? The presence of Jesus would not deter the ugly deed. The Lord did not force Judas to be faithful. Neither does He override our intentions. No! We can act like His friend one moment and be His enemy the next. Intentions are not the main issue. Faithfulness is.

. Could I Betray Him? Every disciple asked if he was the culprit. Since, they had to ask, were they really sure? Do we know ourselves? Will we be able to withstand the temptation to turn against Him? In truth, any one of us could. And, over the long haul, many of us will.

. How Can I Avoid Treason? The disciples were wise to ask. For every one should be alert to the possibility. Paul wrote: “*If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall*,” I Corinthians 10:12. The very fear of falling may keep us standing. The Lord can help. Like a good Shepherd, He watches over His sheep, Jude 24.

If we draw close to Jesus, we enhance our chances of remaining His friend. This Supper can be a safety net, a refuge of protection. When we fill our minds with Christ, there is no room left for the devil.

Let us be safe rather than sorry.

SURELY NOT I ?

On several occasions, Jesus had said “someone” would betray Him, Matthew 17:22; 20:18; 26:2. His announcement in the upper room was not “breaking news.” But, in that gathering, He pointed an accusing finger: “*It will be one of you!*” In response, one-by-one, the disciples asked, “*Is it I?*”

. Who Was The Betrayer? Like us, Judas was capable of good and evil. He answered the call. He traveled for years with the Lord. Yet, along with his good intentions, he had a fatal flaw. He was capable of betraying the Lord.

. What Was The Crime? The Iscariot is hated because of his treachery. He knew the Lord. He had seen Him in action. He knew His routine. Aware that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, the betrayer set the trap.

. What Was His Excuse? His actions make no sense. Did he merely want to force Jesus’ hand—to get Him to set up His kingdom? Many think so. Before the deed, sin always looks plausible. After it is done, it always feels stupid!

If the Lord was here today, would He say, “*One of you will betray Me?*” Would He point His finger at you or me? And, if He did, how would we react? Likely, we might do what Judas did—disregard His warning.

NOW is the time to commit our lives anew to God. NOW, during Communion, is the opportunity to honor Him as our Lord. NOW, in this Supper, we should remember Him.

Let us make that commitment before it is too late.

THE ONE WHO EATS WITH ME

Jesus had declared He would be betrayed. But, up to that point, He had not identified the culprit. John reclined next to Jesus. He leaned back and whispered, “*Lord, who is it?*” John 13:25. Christ quietly responded, “*It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread,*” John 13:26.

The secret was out! The betrayer was identified. The monstrous deception was uncovered. In the words of the psalmist, “*His close friend—in whom He trusted—lifted up his heel against Him,*” Psalm 41:9. In the Middle East, eating together is supposed to be a sign of friendship.

. Jesus Had Many Friends. The Lord loved the rich young man, Mark 10:21, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, John 11:5, as well as the apostle John, John 19:26. His affection for them makes Him more real, more attractive, and more approachable.

. We Are His Friends. There is nothing in the Lord that keeps us from being His close companion. It is right to aspire to sit and eat with Him in His kingdom. We can all be His friends, if we do what He commands, John 15:14.

There is no favoritism with Jesus. All His followers are invited to His table. If we have responded to His call, if we have accepted His invitation, there is room in His banquet hall.

The bread and the fruit of the vine are shared among friends. Jesus wants us to take and eat. We do so to remember His kindness, to enjoy His companionship.

Let us commune with Him as friends.

SATAN ENTERED HIM

After Jesus had eaten the Passover bread with Judas, "*satan entered*" the traitor, John 13:27. It was the tipping-point. It was the line of no return. Judas crossed it. The devil took control. The Iscariot became a lost cause.

Judas waded too deep into the swamp of sin. The quicksand of wickedness pulled him under. "*It would be better for him if he had never been born,*" Jesus said, Mark 14:21. A life wasted! An existence squandered! If Judas had tried to resist, he failed. He surrendered his soul. The powers of hell took over.

The moment of truth had arrived (though only Peter and John heard what the Lord said). Jesus kept the identity of Judas hidden (for the time being). In other words, the sin of Judas was handled in a compassionate manner. The dastardly deed remained out of sight. Jesus loved Judas like we should love our betrayers.

Satan took over. Judas abandoned Jesus. And, if we flirt with the devil, we will also walk away from the Messiah. It is inevitable. One cannot hold hands with satan and the Savior (at the same time). We must chose. Who will it be? Will we follow the One from Galilee?

As for me, I will serve the Lord!

For all who are committed to Jesus, the table of remembrance is prepared. Come to the feast. Eat the bread. Drink the juice. Thank the Lord.

Let us show our appreciation for Christ.

WOE TO THE MAN WHO BETRAYS ME

It was determined by God that the Messiah would suffer. But that decision did not lessen the guilt of the one who caused it. *“Woe to him who betrays the Son of Man,”* Mark 14:21.

That prediction indicates that the crucifixion was not an accident. *“I am telling you now, before it happens,”* Christ said, *“so that when it happens you will believe that I am He,”* John 13:19. Judas realized his mistake. He felt the guilt. He knew better but did not do better.

Woe to such a heartless person! The role of his conscience was ignored. God did not approve of his error. He could not pretend Judas was right when he was wrong

Indeed, the evil of Judas was overruled. His awful deed ushered in the salvation of the world! But his crime was still a crime. His sin was still a sin. The traitor was still a traitor. And the “woe” was still a curse.

Let us come to the table with a pure heart. Let us worship with a focused mind. Let us concentrate on the body and the blood of the Lord. Let us eat the bread and drink the wine with a sincere heart.

If we participate mindlessly—if we partake in a mechanical manner—let us repent lest He denounce our carelessness. This is a family celebration. We need to be here—willing to concentrate, ready to focused on the Lord.

Let us think of Him and Him alone.

IT IS BETTER IF HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN

His wretched life was not worth living. His prize for sin was not worth claiming. Judas became a back-stabber. It would have been better (for him) if he had never been born, Matthew 26:24.

Jesus did not hold out any hope for Judas. His words were final. No restoration was possible. The betrayer was bound for eternal misery. A hopeful beginning! A sad conclusion!

The traitor had asked Jesus, “*Is it I?*” Christ quietly affirmed what Judas already knew. The Iscariot was guilty. Why ask? Why pretend?

But we all do it now and then. Self-examination is hard work. Faking it is more fun. We go through the motions. We put on a front. We make believe—bluff and masquerade. We pass ourselves off as genuine (when we know we are a counterfeit). We partake of the emblems while our minds think on other things.

Enough of being like Judas! God knows. He wants us to pause, ponder, and focus on the meaning of the Supper. He wants us to rivet our minds on His sacrifice. He wants us to think of our salvation. This is the purpose of the Communion.

Judas knew better. So do we. It is our turn to make a decision. What will it be? Now is the moment when the truth is on display.

Let us give our all to Him who gave His all for us.

DO IT QUICKLY

After the Lord ate the Passover bread with Judas, after satan entered the Iscariot, Jesus said (to him), *"What you are about to do, do it quickly,"* John 13:27b.

Jesus was not talking about taking the Lord's Supper. His words are not a justification for haste in the Communion service. Christ was referring to the betrayal. Since Judas was intent on treachery, the Lord told him to "get on with it!"

Are those words a command or an encouragement? Perhaps, they were both. The Lord wanted Judas to finish what he had started. In effect, Christ said, "Do not prolong the agony!" The betrayer should not dillydally. In so many words, the Messiah advised, "When you are going to sin, do not masquerade as a saint!"

If there was any softness left in the hard heart of Judas, those words must have stung. *"Do it quickly!"* Once sin is embraced, it is a relief to commit the atrocity. In other words, when evil is conceived, its birth must not be delayed.

The Lord was ready whenever Judas took action. Christ knew that good would come from it. He wanted to move past the darkness so that the grace of God could shine.

The Supper is spread for those who are faithful. It is ready for the prepared. The bread and the wine represent what Jesus gladly gave for the redemption of this world. He calls us to His table. He wants us to eat and drink as friends should and do.

Let us take time to remember.

NO ONE UNDERSTOOD

Jesus told Judas, "*What you are about to do, do quickly.*" So the betrayer abruptly departed. None of the disciples knew the true reason why, John 13:27b,28. Only the Gospel of John mentions this detail.

Events were occurring faster than the disciples could process. Life has those moments.

When we do not comprehend something, it is common for us to invent explanations. The disciples did. Some thought Jesus told Judas to "*buy things needed for the Passover.*" Others supposed he went to "*give alms to the poor,*" John 13:29. These were plausible assumptions (since Judas was the treasurer of the group). But, instead, he was going to betray the Master!

In our day, things also happen during the Supper of the Lord. People participate in ways that defy reasonable explanation. They fidget and fuss. They shuffle papers and straighten their hair. They distract those nearby. They whisper messages and play with their phone. How can their minds be filled with Him? How can they please the Lord? How can they honor His name?

Jesus asked for a few moments of our time. He hung on the cross for six long hours! If we do so little for Him, how can we expect Him to do so much for us? He wants our attention. He expects us to focus. Dare we do otherwise? He did His best. Surely we can do our best, too.

Let us show that we really care.

JUDAS LEFT

“As soon as Judas had taken the (Passover) bread,” he left the upper room, John 13:30. The horrible deed moved forward. The traitor marched with determined steps to destroy the One who had done nothing wrong!

There was no excuse for his actions. The Lord had been kind to Judas. But, with newly washed feet, the Iscariot walked a short distance to join those bent on murdering the Messiah.

JUDAS LEFT. He turned his back on his friends. He abandoned his spiritual family. He cared more for this world than for the world to come!

JUDAS LEFT. He preferred to face the future by himself. He walked away from the promises of God, from the assurances of joy, and from the hope of eternal life. He did not care!

JUDAS LEFT. He never returned. He denied the Lord. The one and only time he met Jesus again, Judas pretended to be his friend in Gethsemane!

One need not walk away in order to abandon Christ. We can merely remain in the pew and let our mind drift to other things. Is not being inattentive during the Communion like leaving the upper room?

Let us stay with the Lord. Let us remember His body and His blood. Let us savor His presence and appreciate His sacrifice.

Let us not leave Jesus out of His Supper.

IT WAS NIGHT

In the Gospel of John, “*night*” has an ominous significance. For, “*night*” is when “*a man stumbles*” for lack of light, John 11:10. In other words, “*night*” was a time for indulging in sin.

The apostle Paul seems to make the same point. He wrote, “*You are all sons of the light. (You) do not belong to the night.*” Why? Because “*those who get drunk, get drunk at night,*” I Thessalonians 5:5-7. Clearly, night had a connection with sin. So, when John said Judas left at “*night*,” he was obviously referring to a sinister deed.

In the cover of night, the Iscariot made his way to those who wanted to kill Jesus. The sky was dark. The air was thick with hate. Sin was wrapped in devious thought. Few noticed.

But the Lord viewed the departure of Judas in another way. When the traitor was gone, Christ said, “*Now the Son of God is glorified and God is glorified in Him,*” John 13:31. What a contrast! Jesus saw the cross as a win. “*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me!*” John 12:32.

The Supper of the Lord is part of that glorification. We honor Him for His great sacrifice. We praise Him for His gracious gift. We thank Him for His victory over the “*night*.”

The emblems we take are symbols of His triumph over the kingdom of darkness. Thus, when we partake, let us demonstrate that we are sons and daughters of the light.

Let us pray.

IN THE KINGDOM

The solemn supper was accompanied by talk of the kingdom. The Jews had waited for centuries to see it. Their wait was over.

Jesus began His ministry saying, *"The kingdom of God is near,"* Mark 1:15. And, while instituting the Lord's Supper, He stated, *"I will not drink again of the fruit of vine until I drink it anew in the kingdom of God,"* Mark 14:25.

. The Kingdom Was Close. The disciples had gone out to proclaim it. *"The kingdom of heaven is near,"* they said, Matthew 10:7. *"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God,"* Luke 14:15. Moreover, the Lord said, *"Some standing here will not taste of death before they see the kingdom of God come with power,"* Mark 9:1.

. The Kingdom Was Present. The Messiah stated, *"If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom has come to you,"* Luke 11:20. Obviously, the wait was over. The Good News of the kingdom of God was being preached. People were eagerly entering it, Luke 16:16. And, to the surprise of some, the Lord said, *"The kingdom is in you,"* Luke 17:20,21.

Christ is with us when we eat His Supper. Though He is physically gone, He is spiritually present. We are blessed by His being here. We rejoice in being citizens of His kingdom.

Hence, when we partake, we should act like He is here, like we are with Him.

Let us eat and drink with the Lord.

THE FIRST PRESIDER

Jesus presided at the first Communion service. He was there in the upper room. He was there on the “*dark betrayal night*.” The One we love the most was the first gracious host.

He was the One who “*gave thanks*” for the bread. Christ was the One who encouraged His disciples to “*take and eat*.” He was the One who “*gave thanks*” for the fruit of the vine. The Lord was the One who told His followers to “*drink*.”

He passed the bread. He passed the wine. He was there. He instituted the Supper. He partook of the emblems, too.

Yes! Jesus presided at the table. He led. He initiated the feast divine. He set the tone. He showed us how. He was both similar to and different from the one who presides today.

. He Was Similar. Jesus asked those present to remember. I do, too. He riveted their minds on the significance of their actions. I do, too. He was sincere. And, so am I.

. But He Was Different. Jesus lead. I follow. He was center stage. I am part of the audience. He gave. I receive. He was the main point. I am merely a footnote.

I preside solely as a helper. I preside to assist so that all of us may participate in an acceptable manner.

It is the Lord we serve. He is the Master. He has first place. We worship Him.

Let us honor the Lord.

WHILE THEY WERE EATING

The Passover was the initial reason for being in the upper room. It commemorated the sacrifice of a lamb to save Israel. The feast had several important steps.

A drink of wine came first.
Then bitter herbs dipped in nuts, figs, and fruit.
A second cup of wine.
Followed by an explanation of what the feast meant.
Then a piece of unleavened bread.
Followed by a serving of roasted lamb.
And finally a third drink of wine.

It was a solemn occasion. Our Lamb was eating the Passover lamb to remember the rescue of God from Egypt.

So “*while they were eating*,” Jesus instituted His Supper, Matthew 26:26. Likely, this occurred between eating the lamb and the third cup of wine.

The Lord “*blessed*” the bread and the cup. The time of remembrance became a time of thanksgiving—a Eucharist of joy. He gave the bread to His disciples saying, “*This is My body.*” And He distributed the cup proclaiming, “*This is My blood.*” He was their Passover lamb. He would die for everyone. He gave His life so that we could live.

The Communion is a meal of faith, a celebration of rescue, the remembrance of a sacrifice. Surely, when they heard those stunning words, they ate in reverent awe.

Let us pray.

THE EMBLEMS

The disciples knew the roasted lamb did not become a Passover sheep again. Likewise, they knew the bread and the juice were not literally Jesus' body and blood.

. They Symbolize His Sacrifice. His death was more than martyrdom. It was a gift given for our atonement. Isaiah predicted it. Paul declared it. We remember it. His broken body redeems us. His shed blood makes us white as snow.

. They Become Part Of Us. We take the emblems. They give us life. For, Christ said, *"Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you,"* John 6:53. Food must be eaten. Jesus must get inside of us.

. They Represent Our Fellowship. We (who are many) become one when we partake of the emblems, I Corinthians 10:17. The Communion proclaims our unity. The elements demonstrate our belonging to each other.

. They Are A Pledge Of Loyalty. We gather at the table. We take of the emblems. We agree to be faithful. This is not a mindless ritual. It is a serious vow to help each other and to trust the Lord.

We intend to do right. We want to honor Him. But we make mistakes. We often fall. We can deny like Peter. We may doubt like Thomas. But, if we repent, we will be renewed by the holy emblems of the sacred Supper.

Let us eat and drink like our lives depended on it.

HE TOOK THE BREAD

The Jews had eaten unleavened bread in the Passover for centuries. They called it the “*the bread of affliction.*” The Passover brought to mind the painful experience of slavery.

The Supper of the Lord is also couched in symbolism. The bread represents the body of Jesus given to purchase our pardon. The Lord picked up the bread and said, “*This is My body,*” Mark 14:22. He did not mean the bread was literally His body. He was there. The disciples could see His body. They knew His body and the bread were separate things.

Elsewhere Christ said, “*I am the gate*” (to the sheep fold), John 10:9. And “*I am the vine and you are the branches,*” John 15:5. In each case, His words were symbolic. Hence, what did He mean when He said, “*This is my body?*”

- . The Bread Is A Source Of Life. Unless we eat it, we will have no life in us, John 6:53. The bread is our life support.

- . The Bread Is A Sign Of Unity. “*We are one body: for we all take of the one bread,*” I Corinthians 10:17.

- . The Bread Is A Declaration Of Faith. Judas had left. Only the faithful remained. They stayed to the end.

We take the unleavened bread to receive life, to show unity, and to declare our faith. The Communion is a simple act with profound significance.

Let us partake in dignity and in truth.

JESUS EXPRESSED THANKS

While they were eating, the Lord abruptly moved away from the Passover script. He took the unleavened bread and “*gave thanks*,” Luke 22:19. Surely, the disciples noticed the change. For, suddenly, there were expressions of gratitude.

We should be thankful, too. What we are about to do is unparalleled in meaning. Let us not allow the familiar routine of this Supper keep us from the joy that is intended.

. He Is Present. Christ is here in this room. After all, He is the host presiding over His meal. If He invited us to join Him, how can He be absent? Let us give thanks for His presence.

. We Are Friends. This is not a gathering of strangers. Christ called us because He wanted us to be together. We are included in His circle of friends. Everyone is welcome here.

. We Need Him. He laid down His life for us. We cannot save ourselves. Our presence is a declaration of our dependence. He is the reason we are here.

We gather at this table to say “*thanks*.” Thanks for our salvation. Thanks for His friendship. Thanks for His being in our lives.

What would this world be without Him? There would be no hope! No forgiveness! No help in times of need!

My joy overflows. My gratitude is complete.

Let us give thanks.

HE TOOK THE CUP

The cup contained the wine—the “*blood of the grape,*” Genesis 49:11. Likely, it was the third cup of the Passover. It was called the “*cup of thanksgiving,*” I Corinthians 10:16. Over that cup, a special prayer of gratitude was spoken.

Like the unleavened bread, the cup was to be distributed among every one present. It was passed from person to person until all were served, Matthew 26:27.

Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of the cup. It was no longer to save the firstborn son from death. Rather it was to save the reborn from the second death. In other words, His blood was the seal of a new covenant.

God made several covenants. He made a promise with Noah never to flood the earth again. He made a pledge with Abraham to make Him the father of a great nation. He made an agreement with Israel to be their God. And, finally, He issued a covenant to send a Messiah to save the world.

- . Covenants contain binding stipulations.
- . Covenants require mutual vows.
- . Covenants demand faithful obedience.
- . Covenants mention beneficial blessings.

The cup held the blood of the new covenant. It represented the life that was given to save us. We drink the fruit of the vine to renew that covenant every week. We take the cup as a solemn pledge to keep our part of the promise.

Let us dedicate ourselves to His new and final covenant.

DIVIDE IT AMONG YOU

When Jesus took the cup, He said, “*Divide it among you,*” Luke 22:17. These words are only found in the Gospel of Luke. The Communion was to be shared.

The question is: With whom was it to be shared? With whom should the Lord’s Supper be divided?

In the upper room, a select group ate and drank with Christ. Pilate was not there. The high priest was not present. The Sanhedrin did not come. The Sadducees and Pharisees were absent. Those that shouted “*crucify Him*” were not invited. And Judas had already left. In short, only His closest allies ate the sacred meal.

Who, then, should partake of the Communion today?

. Those Who Know Him. Since He said, “*Do this in memory of Me,*” only those who know Him can remember Him.

. Those Who Accept Him. The Supper is for those who care for Him and love Him. They are His disciples.

. Those Who Follow Him. The emblems are for those who do His will, obey His commands, and rely on His help.

The Communion is not a snack for the curious, a sample for the superficial, or a cool-thing-to-do for the uncommitted. It is His meal to be done in His way by members of His Church.

Let those who belong participate in His Supper.

BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

The shed blood of Jesus ratified the new covenant, Matthew 26:28. The old agreement was adopted at Mount Sinai by the blood of animals, Exodus 24:5-8. It was a temporary arrangement. The new covenant established through the blood of Christ is a permanent agreement.

His sacrifice was absolutely essential. *“Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness,”* Hebrews 9:22. But, unlike the blood of goats and calves, the blood of the Lord obtained for us *“eternal redemption,”* Hebrews 9:12. *“He is able to save completely”* those who come to God. That includes all the sins of all the people throughout all time, Hebrews 7:25.

. The Covenant Involves Taking A Pledge And Making A Promise . In the new covenant, God pledges to forgive our sin and we promise to faithfully obey Him.

. The Covenant Was Sealed By Blood. A seal was a sign of ownership, I Corinthians 1:22. God claims those who are washed in the blood. We bow to Him as our only God.

. The Covenant Is Renewed In Drinking The Wine. We drink the grape juice as a reminder of our agreement with Him. We refresh our pledge of allegiance every week.

It is a serious mistake to ignore the significance of the Supper. We welcome the opportunity to reconnect with our Father, to reestablish our friendship with heaven, to renew our vow to carefully do His will. The Supper is a reminder of the covenant.

Let us renew our agreement with God as we eat and drink.

POURED OUT FOR MANY

Jesus said the cup represented His blood that was “*poured out for many*,” Mark 14:24. Though He died for everyone, not everyone accepts His death, Mark 10:45; Hebrews 9:28.

We are “*reconciled...by the death of His Son*,” Romans 5:10. We are brought near by His blood, Ephesians 2:13. “*He bore our sins in His body on the tree*,” I Peter 2:24. In short, we are rescued through the cross. Why?

. We Need A Savior. Dreadful consequences await those who indulge in wickedness. God does not look the other way. “*A man reaps what he sows*,” Galatians 6:7. And, as the Bible says, “*the wages of sin is death*,” Romans 6:23.

. We Are All Sinners. God does not compromise with evil. Jesus purchased our pardon. He “*poured out*” His blood to save us. Before we did anything, He did everything. Christ died for us while we were still sinners, Romans 5:8.

. God Was Willing To Save. Our Lord did not persuade a reluctant God to redeem us. Quite to the contrary! God was reconciling the world unto Himself, II Corinthians 5:19. The Almighty took the initiative in saving us, John 3:16.

Christ brought us to God, I Peter 3:18. The doors of the celestial throne room are wide open. Jesus blazed the trail. He died so that we might live, Romans 5:9; I Thessalonians 5:10.

That is what we celebrate today.

Let us give thanks to Him for pouring out His blood.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The fruit of the vine is a symbol of His blood shed on the cross, Matthew 26:28. That blood was poured out for many *“for the forgiveness of sins.”* This is one of the rare times Christ talked about the purpose of His death. For the most part, He left the clarification of His crucifixion for the apostles to explain.

- . His Blood Represents Life. It is central to the Supper. *“Life is in the blood,”* Leviticus 17:11. Thus, Christ gave His life so that we could have life. His sacrifice is our salvation. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,”* Hebrews 9:22.

- . His Blood Seals The Covenant. The Messiah inaugurated a new agreement with heaven. The old covenant became obsolete, Hebrews 8:13. A new arrangement took its place. Remission of sins is based on grace. It is offered to everyone.

- . His Blood Bought Salvation. One of the flashpoints in Jesus’ ministry was His saying *“your sins are forgiven.”* How dare He say that! Only God can forgive sins. But Christ was God. His blood pardons our offenses.

The Lord bore the sins of many, Isaiah 53:12d. Because of Calvary, He draws everyone to Himself, John 12:32. Like a giant magnet, the Lord attracts the lost to His bleeding side.

He offers the gift of forgiveness. He welcomed us into His family. He spread this table for His children to remember their blood bought pardon.

Let us thank Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

A GRAND CELEBRATION

The Communion is a simple ceremony with a grand significance. Let us notice some of the high points.

. Christ Is Present. He is here (though not literally in the bread and the wine). He is here in spirit around this table to meet with His friends. Can He (who is the host) be absent?

. Christ Is Food. The bread and the fruit of the vine are reminders of our source of eternal life. The Lord is a constant, every-day-of-the-week fountain of spiritual nourishment.

. Christ Is Savior. He was bruised. He was broken. His body was pierced. His blood was shed. Sorrow and love flowed mingled down. And thorns composed His crown.

. Christ Is Remembered. As we eat and drink, we think of Him. We partake because we have a need. It is a declaration of our faith, a recommitment to His cause.

We gather around the same table, to take the same emblems, to acknowledge the same truths. We linger to remember. It is a grand celebration of a great event. There is none other like it.

We realize the hope we have. Faith, joy, and love are kindled anew. We are strengthened and set apart. We are built up and renewed. Because of this sacred ceremony, we are enabled to move closer to the banquet in the sky.

Let us rejoice.

SERMONS IN THE SUPPER

A sermon is delivered to explain a truth and encourage an action. The Supper of the Lord can be compared to a proclamation from the pulpit. It teaches truth and expects obedience.

- . It Points To The Incarnation. Jesus was God in the flesh. He was born of a woman, lived like a human. The elements of the Supper symbolize His body and blood. As we are, so He was—fully man (though still) fully God.

- . It Emphasizes The Atonement. Christ died to reunite sinners with God. Those who were alienated were provided a means of reconciliation. The body and blood of the Messiah established peace between heaven and earth.

- . It Provides Eternal Life. As a sermon, the Communion is food for the soul. If we do not eat and drink, we have no life in us. But, thanks to Jesus, whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life, John 6:53,54. Could anything be clearer?

- . It Suggests The Second Coming. When we partake, we remember He was here. But now He is gone. We wait for His return. And, when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim His death “*until He comes again,*” I Corinthians 11:26.

The Supper of the Lord is not a trivial matter. It has serious implications. It says we believe in the incarnation, atonement, eternal life, and the second coming. In taking the emblems, we say much without speaking a word!

Let us quietly preach our sermon.

A NEW TRUTH

The disciples would not eat the Passover again. Instead, new meanings would replace old understandings. The unleavened bread and the grape juice would remain. But their significance was changed.

. It Is A Simple Supper. Unlike the Passover, the Communion has only two ingredients. They are common items of food. The focus is removed from the labor of preparing and replaced by the joy of remembering.

. It Is A Meaningful Occasion. The bread is His body. The juice is His blood. They represent the sacrifice He made for us. He gave His life “*once for all*,” Hebrews 7:27. He asked us to think about what He did.

. It Is A Required Observance. Jesus expects us to regularly eat His Supper. It must not be aimlessly skipped or carelessly done. For, when we partake, we are renewing our covenant with God. It is a serious matter to keep it current.

The Communion is a profound confession of faith. We acknowledge our devotion to Him who is devoted to us. He did what we could not do for ourselves.

The Communion is an affirmation of unity. As a family, we take the meal together as brothers and sisters. We declare our mutual concern for each other. We reaffirm our membership in the community of faith when we eat the bread and drink the wine.

Let us keep in mind the truth of the Supper.

YOU WILL DISOWN ME

Jesus shocked the disciples. The Lord said He was going away. *"Where are You going?"* Peter asked. *"You cannot follow Me!"* *"But I will lay down my life for You,"* Peter replied. *"No!"* the Lord answered. *"I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times,"* John 13:33-38.

Those were painful words. But the prophet had predicted, *"The Shepherd will be smitten and the sheep will be scattered,"* Zechariah 13:7. Satan wanted to sift His followers like wheat, Luke 22:31. The apostles were put through a sieve to separate them from the chaff.

Judas was chaff. The rest of the them were a mixture of grain and chaff. And so are we. A fearless follower one minute and a cowering betrayer the next! Let us be cautious as we eat with Christ today.

Peter was sure he would never disown the Messiah. *"If I must die for You,"* Peter said, *"I will not disown You,"* Matthew 26:35. Yet, a few hours later, when the chips were down, Peter claimed he did not know the Lord, Mark 14:71.

The sieve is ready. The test is near. The words of Jesus are accurate. Peter stumbled. The disciples scattered. And what will we do? Satan wants to embarrass us, to cause us to fall before this very day is over. Will we do any better than Peter?

The Supper is prepared for those who rely on Christ, who know they are vulnerable, who partake with caution.

Let us be true to the One we honor in this meal.

I AM READY

When Jesus told the disciples that they would disown Him, Peter balked. He replied, *"I am ready to go with You to prison and to death,"* Luke 22:33. The Lord knew such bravado was merely hot air. And, to make matters worst, Peter went on to say, even if others fell away, *"I never will,"* Matthew 26:33. But he did *"that very night,"* Mark 14:30.

There are several important lessons here.

- . Satan Is Real. Peter ignored the obvious. The devil had him by his shirt-tail. Still Peter bragged: *"I will never disown You,"* Mark 14:31. All the other disciples said the same thing!

- . Satan Wants Us. The evil one is constantly looking for ways to catch us off guard. Our *"enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour,"* 1 Peter 5:8.

- . We Are Warned. Every day is a time to win or lose. Even though we put on the armor of God, we must still *"pray,"* Ephesians 6:18. Let us NOT engage the serpent alone.

- . Jesus Prays For Us. The Lord told Peter: *"I have prayed for you,"* Luke 22:32. The apostle failed (though his fall was cushioned by Christ). Peter learned the hard way. Will we?

The Supper is an acknowledgement that we are sinners. Dare we leave this hallowed moment bragging about never disowning the Lord! He has warned us! He is praying for us! Are we paying attention?

Let us partake with a spirit of caution.

HE COMFORTS HIS DISCIPLES

According to the Gospel of John, immediately after mentioning the denial of Peter, Jesus said, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled,*” cf. John 13:28 and John 14:1.

The prospect of disowning the Lord bears heavily on the souls of the saints. “*Come unto Me,*” He says, “*All you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*” Matthew 11:28.

. There Is A Remedy For A Heavy Heart. Christ was leaving them. He begged the disciples to “*trust in God,*” John 14:1b. He asks us to do the same today. For, in heaven, there is plenty of room for all who believe, John 14:2a. And Christ is coming back to take us home.

. There Is A Reason For A Happy Heart. Heaven is like a mansion. It has a lot of rooms. And, if that was not so, Jesus would have told us, John 14:2b. Actually, He indicated that our reservations are already made. Our future is secure (unless we twitter it away in sinful living).

Our trust is in the One we remember today. He gave us the bread and the fruit of the vine. He encouraged us to take the emblems as a sign of our faith, a symbol of our heavenly hope.

So, perhaps, the greatest reason for a happy heart is that we “*know the way*” to our eternal home, John 14:4. Indeed, our confidence is not build on human effort but on divine accomplishment. We have the map. Christ is there. We will join Him soon.

Let us partake with joy and trust.

HE PROMISES THE SPIRIT

The Lord was leaving, John 14:2a. But the disciples would not be alone. He would send them the Holy Spirit, John 14:15-17a.

Sinners cannot receive the Spirit, John 14:17b. Only the saints are given that gift. We are not orphans. God is with us.

The Spirit is given to receptive, sympathetic believers. For, those who do not know Christ and those who do not follow His teachings, any talk of the indwelling Spirit is utter nonsense, I Corinthians 2:14.

We accept the Spirit. We live by the power of God. He is our help, our refuge, and our strength every day. When we grasp that truth, we catch a glimpse of heaven.

The Supper of the Lord is a similar experience. In partaking of the emblems, we commune with Christ as Friend with friend. He is here. He meets us where we are. He wishes to bring us where He is. It is awesome to realize that each week we stand near the door of our eternal dwelling.

We press on because the Spirit beckons us home. We renew our effort to claim our mansion in the sky. The Lord offers us a hand. And, together, we walk toward the halls of ceaseless joy.

In remembering what He did to pave the way, we partake with profound appreciation. The bread and juice represent His life sacrificed so that we can live with Him—both now and for evermore.

Let us allow the Spirit to guide us home.

STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN

Though still in the upper room, Satan was ready to tempt Peter. Jesus warned him. The Lord said, “*I have prayed for you,*” Luke 22:31,32. But, knowing the frailty of His disciple, Christ added, “*And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*”

- . The Tempter Was Real. Jesus had confronted the adversary. He knew how devious the devil was. Judas had yielded. Would Peter do likewise? The Lord hoped he would not—but knew he would (temporarily).

- . The Disciple Was Vulnerable. Peter needed the help of heaven. We do, too. The temptation was used by God to make Peter what he eventually became. And, like Simon, our failings can also make us a better person.

- . The Lord Issued An Assignment. After His resurrection, the Messiah asked Peter to take care of His sheep, John 21:16. Though a blunderer, Simon had learned a valuable lesson. He could help others up since he himself had fallen down.

When we falter and repent, God will enlist us to “feed His lambs.” Mistakes are part of growing. Maturity comes from trying again. We cannot strengthen others until we learn what our weaknesses are.

Look out for the devil. Take the Supper. And, like Peter, know we can fail. But, once on our feet again, we have an assignment to do.

Let us be aware of our failures and be ready to try again.

BUY A SWORD

Christ was a popular teacher. Yet He was often misunderstood.

. There Were First Century Misunderstandings. In the upper room, the Lord said, "*If you do not have a sword, buy one,*" Luke 22:36. A curious request! His followers took Him literally. For, they replied, "*Here are two swords!*" So, Jesus responded, "*That is enough!*" Luke 22:38.

Why did He suggest having a sword? They were leaving the safety of the guest room. They were stepping back into the real world. They were going to be exposed to pressures beyond what they had ever experienced. Perhaps, the sword was a metaphor for being prepared. Obviously they misunderstood.

. There Are Contemporary Misunderstandings. We often fail to comprehend the words of Jesus. We frequently misunderstand the significance of "*Do this in My memory.*" There is more to remembering than we tend to do.

Can we give complete justice to His directive when we spend no more than a few seconds in reflection? How do we understand the bread being His body? How do we comprehend the juice being His blood? Is there more to learn? Is there more to know?

Yes! We could do better! We could spend more time! We could think deeper! We could demonstrate more commitment! We could put more emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the sacred Supper.

Let us allow God to lead us to partake in a more wholesome way.

SANG A HYMN

It was customary to conclude the Passover celebration with a hymn, Mark 14:26. Likely, Jesus and the disciples sang the Hallel (that consisted of part or all of Psalms 115 - 118).

The saga of the upper room ended with singing about the glory of God. Did the disciples pay attention to the words? Here is some of what they sang.

- . *"Trust the Lord; He is our help and shield," Psalm 115:9.*
- . *"The Lord will bless us," Psalm 115:12.*
- . *"I love the Lord. He has heard my voice," Psalm 116:1.*
- . *"Truly I am Your servant," Psalm 116:16.*
- . *"The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid," Psalm 118:6.*

The Supper was over. They sang about the care of God. They praised His goodness. They rejoiced that He heard their prayers. They claimed that He was their Master.

The first Communion was finished. Perhaps, the meaning of the upper room had not fully dawned on them. Perhaps, like us, they mindlessly went through the motions. If they had realized its significance, they may have felt different.

And, truth be known, we should feel different when we partake of the emblems. This is a special time, a high point of the week. Should we not treat the Communion as an opportunity for glorifying God? Should we not pay attention to the words that are being said? Should we not be preparing for what is just around the corner?

Let us not miss the meaning of the moment.

LET US LEAVE

There are times to stay. And there are times to go. The memorable moments in the upper room were over. So the Lord said, "*Let us leave,*" John 14:31b.

Obviously, the Communion was concluded. But the story was not finished. The departure signaled a change of scenery but not a change of assignment.

. It Was Time To Move On. The world waited. Duty called. Christ had not finished His reason for being on the earth. Sinners were still lost. The cross was ahead. The sacrifice had not been made. Jesus had things to do.

. It Was Time To Face Reality. The upper room was a nice place. Yet it did not save anyone. It was a quiet space for meditation. Yet meditation does not spread the Good News. We must leave the cozy confines of the Supper to fulfill the reason for eating the feast.

. It Was Time To Make A Difference. Communion is supposed to change us, to renew us, to prepare us to speak a good word for Christ. We must leave here in order to fulfill our assignment out there. Indeed, it is good to be here but Jesus wants us to leave, to "go and make disciples."

Once Communion is over, once we depart from this place, it is time to practice what was preached. It is time to be the hands and feet of the Messiah. He wants us to invite others. He wants us to go so others will come.

Let us eat and drink so that we can go and do.

GETHSEMANE

The walk to the Mount of Olives took about twenty minutes. They made their way to the Kidron Valley, crossed a dry wash, and went into the Garden of Gethsemane, John 18:1.

This small olive grove was a special place for Jesus and his disciples. Gethsemane held a host of vivid memories. Here are some of them.

- . It Was A Familiar Place. Jesus often went there with the twelve, John 18:2. It was a get away, a respite from the demanding crowds.

- . It Was A Grove Of Agony. In the garden His sweat was like *"drops of blood,"* Luke 22:44. The Lord *"offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears,"* Hebrews 5:7.

- . It Was A Garden Of Betrayal. Judas lead a small unit of soldiers to this secluded place, John 18:3. The betrayer could do his dirty work uninterrupted. And he did.

Gethsemane was the where Christ triumphed. It is where Jesus said, *"Not My will but Yours be done,"* Luke 22:42. The Lord surrendered there. His nightmare was just beginning.

Communion is our Gethsemane. It is our retreat. It is where we confess—not my will but yours be done. It is where we surrender before going out to serve. May this Supper be our retreat, a symbol of our submission, and the starting line for our service this week.

Let us pray.

WATCH AND PRAY

When Jesus and His disciples arrived at Gethsemane, the Lord told them to “*watch and pray*,” Matthew 26:41. Watchfulness sees temptation coming. Prayer gives strength to withstand it. The disciples needed both.

. The Lord Prayed. Jesus asked the Father to remain with Him. He was heard, Hebrews 5:7d. God sent an angel to strengthen Christ for the ordeal ahead, Luke 22:43. The Almighty was listening. He answered without delay.

. The Disciples Slept. Though they were forewarned, they ignored the warning. Instead of praying, they took a nap, Luke 22:45. Instead of watching, they closed their eyes. They were totally unprepared for what was about to happen.

The eleven were caught off guard. They reacted on impulse. Peter grabbed a sword. And, with a wild swing, he cut off the ear of one of the insurgents.

A difficult situation was made more difficult. The disciples were now liable. Though facing His own troubles, Jesus used His power to reattach the ear, to free His disciples from arrest.

Christ asks us to watch and pray. He knows what is coming. He wants us to be prepared. He is listening. He will answer.

Let us not resort to mindless and impulsive behavior when we partake. He asks us to think of His sacrifice, to recall His body and His blood.

Let us watch and pray.

YOU WILL FALL AWAY

In the upper room, Jesus said the disciples would disown Him. Now, in Gethsemane, He shocks them, again. *"This very night"* He said, *"You will all fall away because of Me,"* Matthew 26:31.

Surely that could not be true! But it was. The desertion would fulfill prophecy. Wow! That night was full of surprises.

. Jesus Was Aware. The Lord was their Shepherd. And He knew His sheep, John 10:14. He knew His followers would abandon Him. He knew them better than they knew themselves. Yet they vigorously objected to His accusation, Mark 14:29.

. The Disciples Were Clueless. They could see Jesus was in agony. They heard Him say He was going to die. But, in spite of what they saw and in spite of what they heard, *"the disciples left Him,"* Matthew 26:56b. Their confidence became their undoing. When they boasted of their faith, they became unfaithful.

If Jesus' closest associates could forsake Him, surely we can, too! Do we think we are stronger? Should we not heed His warning? Dare we boast of our faithfulness? Surely, *"if we falter in times of trouble, our strength is weak,"* Proverbs 24:10.

We should beg for strength during the Supper. *"Help us, Jesus, to concentrate during the Communion."* May we draw so close to Christ that the devil has no room to stand between the two of us.

Let us fix our eyes on our Lord.

GOOD INTENTIONS

The Lord told His disciples that they would abandon Him. For, He said, *"The spirit is willing but the body is weak,"* Mark 14:38.

Instead of scolding, He encouraged. Instead of condemning, He counseled. Instead of belittling, He built up. In a critical moment, He selflessly thought of others rather than Himself.

While Christ prayed, His disciples slept. *"Could you not watch for one hour?"* He knew they intended well but they failed to do well. It had been a long and stressful evening. They may have had good intentions. But they had heavy eyelids!

. Were Their Intentions Shallow? Worthy ambitions are good. Yet "the streets of hell are paved by good intentions." The thoughts of the disciples were mere sentiments. They did not act with resolve. They let the opportunity to be faithful slip through their fingers.

. Are Our Intentions Genuine? If we resolve to be faithful, if we desire to keep our feet on the path of righteousness, then our intentions are sincere. But due respect should be given to reality. Intentions must be measured by actions. In this way, sentiments can be seen for what they really are.

Is the Lord's Supper a sentiment or a conviction? Do we pour our hearts into remembering Him? Do we clear our minds? Do we give Him our full attention? The way we take the emblems is a reflection of our wishes. We may fool others but we never fool God!

Let our conduct be a testimony of our conviction.

NOT MY WILL

How does Calvary differ from Gethsemane? Though the two scenes are similar, they are quite different. Physical sufferings stand out at Calvary. Mental anguish is front and center in the olive grove.

Life is like that. Earth is a battlefield. There are “*conflicts on the outside and fears within*,” II Corinthians 7:5. We have problems with others and struggles with ourselves.

Jesus did, too. Gethsemane was His battlefield. But He confronted the issues. He settled the conflicts. “*Not what I will*,” He told His Father, “*but what You will*,” Mark 14:36.

. Life Is A Battle Of Wills. The Lord submitted. But our thoughts, our desires, and our preferences demand first place. They seek preeminence. After all, we have our rights! Christ gave up His rights. He deferred to the will of heaven. “*Your will be done*,” He said, Luke 22:42. Should we not do the same?

. Victory Is A Decision To Surrender. Our triumph is our giving in. It is our refusing to put our ambition above the will of God. It is letting Him be first—letting Him rule our life! As the Prince of Peace, Jesus offers us tranquility in a world of despair. Will we stop the fight so that we can win the war?

Gethsemane is where the victory was won. “*Not My will*” was the white flag that conquered the cross. God is in control. May we submit! And if we do, we will be conquerors, too.

Let us repeat the victory verse: “Not My will but Yours be done.”

THE KISS

The arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane was a pretense. *“Am I leading a rebellion,”* He asked, *“that You have come with weapons to capture Me?”* Mark 14:48.

Why did they come with weapons? Why not take Him in the temple? Why not arrest Him in the marketplace? What was the hurry? Was the betrayer worried about losing his thirty pieces of silver?

. The Mob Showed Force. All the saber rattling! All the bravado! All of the big wigs coming to arrest the humble Galilean! It is an interesting study in human behavior. *“Do you not know I can call on My Father and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels,”* Jesus said, Matthew 26:53. Christ exposed their stupidity.

. Judas Showed Friendship. Since it was night and since (according to legend) one of the disciples looked like Christ, Judas identified the Savior. *“Going at once to Jesus,”* he said, *“ ‘Greetings, Rabbi,’ and kissed Him,”* Matthew 26:49. What hypocrisy! What a sham! The Lord was NOT his rabbi nor his friend. How could he say such a thing?

The Communion is for friends of the Master. Therefore, we must abandon any pretense. We must not engage in the same tom-foolery as Judas and the mob. We must approach the table with a pure heart, clear conscience, and honest intent.

Jesus will receive us, dine with us, and bless our time together.

Let us commune with honest intentions.

NO MORE OF THIS

In the olive garden, when Peter cut off the man's ear, Jesus literally said, "*Permit this!*" Luke 22:51. Was He talking to His capturers? Or was He speaking to Peter?

The majority of English translations try to remain neutral. They have Christ saying, "*No more of this!*" In spite of the difficulty of interpreting, the idea seems clear.

The use of the sword was unnecessary. Violence was counter productive. "*Put your sword back in its place,*" Jesus said. "*All who draw the sword will die by the sword,*" Matthew 26:52.

. Christ Did Not Need Protecting. There was no need for weapons. God was watching over the Messiah. "*Bitterness, rage, anger, and brawling*" have no place in the kingdom, Ephesians 4:31. Violence was not appropriate—then or now! "So," Paul wrote, "*I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the pagans do,*" Ephesians 4:17.

. Christianity Does Not Need Protecting. The use of the sword is reckless. Is not God in control? Can He not take care of His cause? Can He not bring His plans to fruition? The weapons of warfare will not spread the Good News. The sword looses far more than it will ever gain. "*Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit,*" says the Lord, Zechariah 4:6.

We come to the feast to renew our love for the Lamb. We bow to worship. We leave this place to spread the fragrance of Him who died for us. Our sword is the Holy Spirit.

Let us draw close to Him so we can become like Him.

LET THEM GO

Christ was aware of what was ahead. He knew His trials were about to begin. Still He wanted to spare His disciples. So He asked the soldiers, “*Who is it you want?*” John 18:7.

The question was not asked to gather information. It was to focus attention. “*If you are looking for Me, then let these men go,*” the Lord added, John 18:8.

His thought—even to the very end—was about His disciples. Knowing the danger that was present (and knowing the weakness of His disciples), He surrendered to protect them.

. Christ Sacrificed Himself. His arrest was the first step in dying for others. It was a plea to protect His closest associates. In effect, He said, “Take Me not them.”

. He Loved His Own. Jesus wanted His fearful disciples to become His fearless messengers. But they could not suffer for Him until He suffered for them. So “let them go.”

. Jesus Left An Example. That was His intention. The world needs to see that message. We need to imitate Him, to live for the benefit of others. “Let them go.”

The Communion reminds us of His self-giving. It tells us to do likewise. It prompts us to be like Him.

The bread represents the body He gave. The fruit of the vine represents the blood He shed. He gave so that we would give.

Let us show the world what “self-giving” really looks like.

THEY RAN AWAY

Gethsemane was a cascade of human reactions. The disciples displayed knee jerk responses to the situation unfolding before them. And what they did is a sample of what we do.

. Jesus Followed The Scriptures. Again and again, in His last hours, the Lord held firmly to the word. He quoted the Old Testament about the disloyalty of the twelve, Matthew 26:31. His meek surrender was also a fulfillment of prophecy, Matthew 25:54. If His disciples had noticed His faithfulness in keeping the word of God, they might have done differently. But they focused their attention on themselves.

. The Disciples Followed Their Instincts. They all “*fled*,” Matthew 26:56. They were like we are: Defending Him one minute and disowning Him the next. Seems like we cannot make up our minds. Our surroundings tend to push us more than the power of God. Though we have good intentions, though we want to follow the Bible, we perform poorly. We disappoint God and we disappoint ourselves.

The disciples knew the Messiah in ways we never will. Yet they “*deserted Him*.” Obedience this morning will not rescue us from stumbling this afternoon. Taking the Supper of the Lord in the upper room did not keep them from running away. Neither will it keep us from deserting Him.

The memories of His death must echo in our minds every moment of every day. We must reaffirm our faith in Him all week long.

Let us run to the Lord as we partake of the emblems.

KANGAROO COURT

Jesus was arrested (though no charge was issued). A quick series of hearings were held: three before Jewish authorities and three before Roman magistrates.

The proceedings were bogus from start to finish. Several important items in the judicial system were blatantly ignored.

- . The hearings were at night (which were against the law).
- . No arguments were allowed in support of the defendant
- . The testimony against Him was contradictory
- . A verdict was reached without supporting evidence

But why bother with the law? The Sanhedrin had decided to execute Christ. Their minds were already made up. Yet they had no evidence to convict Him, Mark 14:55.

In the language of today, the trial of the Lord was a “Kangaroo Court.” It was a mock judicial proceeding in violation of established legal precedent. It is characterized by dishonesty.

I affirm that there is also a “kangaroo communion.” It is done in haste. The minds of the partakers are already made up. The bread and the fruit of the vine are taken in a mechanical manner. The whole proceeding disregards the reason for the Supper, disrespects the purpose of the meal. The sacred becomes a charade—filled with pretend and make-believe.

I do not want to be part of such mockery. And I do not want you to be a part of it either.

Let us pause and remember what we are about to do.

KEPT HIS DISTANCE

When Christ was arrested, the disciples “*ran away*.” But Peter and John had second thoughts. For, in the very next scene, they are present at the first preliminary hearing.

Peter kept his distance, Matthew 26:58. He held back. But John knew Caiaphas (the high priest in charge of the legal proceedings). So John was welcome. He got permission for Peter to come inside, John 18:15,16.

The two men were in the same place. They observed the same events. Yet they reacted very differently.

. John Was There. The son of Zebedee walked right in. He was comfortable. He knew the people. The people knew him. Hence, it was easy for John to mix-and-mingle with the crowd.

. Peter Was There. The other disciple was a stranger. He “walked at a distance.” He needed to be invited into the house. He felt uncomfortable. He lingered at the edge of the crowd.

These two followers of Christ represent those who gather around this table. Some of us are close to the Lord. Others are distant. Some of us feel comfortable. Others are practically strangers.

This occasion brings us together. It is a time for warm and joyful fellowship. All of His followers are welcome. The Lord wants to be with His children. He wants us to enjoy His company.

Let us draw close to Jesus.

BUT HE DID!

Jesus had predicted it. Peter denied it, Matthew 26:34,35. But it happened. A young girl recognized the impetuous disciple, Luke 22:55,56. Immediately, Peter began denying he knew the Lord: *"I do not know Him."* *"I am not one of His."*

The pressure mounted. There were more accusations! More denials! Finally, a relative of the man Peter injured in the olive grove, said *"Did I not see you with Jesus?"* *"No!"* Peter replied, John 18:25-27. A bad scene just got much worse!

Likely, Peter could not believe his denial. He had *"insisted emphatically"* that he would not do it, Mark 14:31. But, he did!

We should realize that we are capable of doing the same thing. We assume we are strong. Yet we have our disappointing moments, Psalm 139:23,24; Revelation 3:17.

The swaggering disciple fell hard. And, to top things off, he continued to pretend what he was not, Matthew 26:74.

Sin is a slippery slope. Once we start down hill, our descent gathers momentum. But, if we shun the first step, we need not worry about crashing at the bottom.

We must examine ourselves in order to partake. We need to own up to our weaknesses. We must call on Christ to give us a pure heart and a right motive.

God wants to hug us. We should embrace Him.

Let us commune with a clear conscience.

HE REMEMBERED

It happened so fast! The temptation to deny Jesus overwhelmed Peter. Though warned, he was unprepared. Though told, he was caught off guard.

In the very act of disowning the Lord, “*a rooster crowed*” and “*the Lord looked at Peter.*” Grief stricken, Peter must have felt ashamed. For he “*remembered*” what the Lord had said, Luke 22:60,61.

Yes! Peter remembered. But it was too late. He had crossed the line. He had disappointed the Master. He had sinned. It was impossible to take back his words.

The fall of Peter shows us how dangerous it is to tamper with the truth. It demonstrates how important it is to keep watch. It reminds us to avoid over-estimating our strength. We cannot hob nob with the enemy and expect to come away unharmed.

This is why we gather each week to remember. We need to remember our frailties. We need to remember His sacrifice. We need to remember to be careful. For “*he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall,*” I Corinthians 10:12. Indeed, we need constant reminders.

So we take this unleavened bread and we drink this grape juice to remember. We call to mind His body and His blood He gave on Calvary to purchase our redemption.

Let us remember as we partake.

HUMILIATION

Over and over, during that awful night, the soldiers guarding Jesus humiliated Him. They beat Him. They slapped Him. They spit on Him, Luke 22:63. It was disgusting. The description is distressing to read, upsetting to hear.

Yet these military men willingly took advantage of their prisoner. Why? They wanted to. They enjoyed the “bullying.” They got their jollies at the expense of another person. Humiliating someone gives a “rush of power” to the abuser.

The long night just got longer. The guards blindfolded Christ. They hit Him with their fists. And, then, they demanded He identify who struck Him, Mark 14:65. We call it “blind man bluff.” It must have been hard for Jesus to remain silent. Nevertheless, “*He opened not His mouth,*” Isaiah 53:7.

Why did He drink that bitter cup? Why did He allow the humiliation? For one reason—He loved us! He gave His sinless life to save us from our sinful existence.

His mockery was mine. His pain belonged to me. I deserve to be humiliated but He took my place. He suffered for my sin. Truly, He is my Redeemer. And He is yours, too!

This bread represents His bruised and battered body. The juice represents His shed blood. He gave all He could so that we can have all we need for eternal life. He endured humiliation on earth so that we could enjoy eternal life in heaven. It is not an even exchange but it was a necessary sacrifice.

Let us not humiliate Him who suffered our humiliation.

VIOLENCE

The band of soldiers that came to Gethsemane, were ready to fight. And, when they arrived in the garden, the disciples were ready to fight back. Bloodshed was imminent.

The disciples asked Christ, “*Should we strike with our swords?*” Luke 22:49. And, before the Lord could respond, Peter did. Violence was ready to erupt into a major brawl.

. There Was Violence Against Christ. In due time, the soldiers inflicted pain on Jesus. In fiendish sport, they took advantage of a defenseless victim. They laughed. They punched. They hurt the One who had helped and healed. Their violence was unwarranted, unnecessary, and unprovoked.

. Violence Of Christians. Christ stopped the confrontation in the olive grove. “*No more of this,*” He said, Luke 22:51. Oh, how I wish subsequent generations of believers had heard His rebuke, Matthew 26:52. Weapons do not save souls! They misrepresent both the spirit of God and the cause of Christ.

How can one remember the Lamb of God in Communion and use violence to subdue our fellowman? How can we worship the gentle Jesus and kill His adversaries?

Violence has no place in the tranquility of the Supper. It has no place in the life of the one who eats the bread and drinks the juice. The Communion is a “love feast” (not the prelude to a killing spree).

Let us allow the kindness of heaven to flood our hearts.

30 SHEKELS

The thirty pieces of silver were a nauseating reminder to Judas, Matthew 27:3. The money could not be returned to the temple treasury. Nobody wanted it for his coin collection. So what could the shekels purchase?

- . The Money Bought A Betrayer. The sum was the price of a slave. Cheap! Disgusting! Wrong! But, today, many people sell Jesus for much less.

- . The Money Could Have Bought A Tomb Marker. The Lord was treated like deposable trash. Yet the cash could have at least secured a simple burial plaque.

- . The Money Bought A Potter's Field. The coins were used to purchase a cemetery—an abandoned pottery site. It became known as the "*field of blood*," Matthew 27:6,7; cf. Acts 1:19.

The cash did not bribe the authorities. The crucifixion was inevitable. It was only a matter of time.

Judas hated what he had done. Miserable is the wretch who sells the Messiah. He should have refused the money before he sold his soul. Judas lost his way, turned his back on his friend, and fell victim to the vice of treason. It was an eternally fatal error.

May remembering His body and His blood fortify us against betraying Him. The temptation is real. The yielding is unthinkable. There is nothing worse than selling our soul.

Let us never betray Him who was faithful to us.

REMORSE OR REPENTANCE

Studying the reactions of Judas and Peter can yield important insights. Both of them were warned. Both of them ignored the warning. Both of them felt they had their situation under control. But both of them sinned.

Judas betrayed Christ. Peter disowned Him. There is little difference between the two. Both were wrong. Both committed treachery. Both caused awful suffering.

Judas planned his betrayal. It was premeditated. Peter acted impetuously. Both were sorry, Matthew 26:75; 27:3. Both wished they had not done their misdeed. One asked his co-conspirators to fix his stupidity. The other asked God to forgive his blunder.

One saw the consequences he caused. The other saw his sin in the light of eternity. One of them committed suicide. The other wept.

Their reactions reflect our choices. We can feel sorry and carry remorse. Or we can repent and be forgiven. What should the Communion prompt us to do?

As much as anybody, we are the cause of His death. Do we have remorse? Do we repent? We know better. But we sin anyway. We should not try to handle the guilt. We should cast our burdens on the Lord. He can remove them.

The bread and the juice remind us of His forgiveness.

Let us pray as we put our sins on the altar.

WHO CARES?

Judas returned the blood money. The Sanhedrin scorned his reaction. “*What is that to us?*” they said, Matthew 27:4. They had gotten what they wanted. They were not sorry.

The Jewish high court was supposed to sympathize with the distressed. Their heartless response said otherwise. “*Who cares?*” they thought. He made his bed. Now let him sleep in it!

Their unfeeling reaction did not refer to the money. It pointed to the remorse of Judas. A soul in travail meant nothing to these so-called clergymen. They helped him sin. Yet they refused to help him escape his desperation.

It is devilish to scoff at a brokenhearted sinner. Yet they did. They were focused on finishing what they had started. Judas was merely collateral damage.

A true saint cares (because God cares). The Lord was not far away. Judas could have gone to Him. He did not. He could have begged for mercy. But he did not do so.

Who cares? Christ does. He did then. He does now. He says, “*Come unto Me all you who are weary,*” Matthew 11:28.

Judas suffered alone. A pitiful end to a promising start! He caused the greatest mess of all time. How sad!

We come to the feast. We come to find the Lord. We seek His fellowship. We desire His friendship. We want His mercy.

Let us care for Him who cared for us.

HIS SILENCE

Jesus stood before the high priest. Caiaphas was frustrated. He was looking for evidence to condemn Jesus. So far he had found none, Matthew 26:59,60. Another charge was brought forth. But Christ *“remained silent,”* Matthew 26:62,63a.

. What Was The Meaning Of His Silence? The Lord knew there was no use answering. No one was listening. If he spoke, His words would fall on deaf ears. However, Caiaphas stepped in. *“I charge You under oath,”* he demanded, Matthew 26:63b. The Law of Moses said one was guilty if he did not respond to an accusation, Leviticus 5:1. So Jesus answered.

. What Was The Meaning Of His Answer? Caiaphas wanted to know if Jesus was the Messiah, Matthew 26:63c. In popular first century opinion, the Messiah was inferior to God but invested with divine characteristics. No doubt the high priest knew Christ had claimed that God was His Father. So he forced a confession. “I am,” Jesus said, Mark 14:62.

Christ affirmed His deity. And, to underscore His point, He said, *“In the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One,”* Matthew 26:64; cf. Luke 22:69.

This is one of the clearest confessions of His Godhood. It was also the surest path to His death. His words were true. God died on the cross to save us.

That is what we celebrate. Are we willing to affirm His deity (regardless of the cost involved)? That is what is required!

Let us quietly affirm His deity.

CONDEMNED

The sun peeked over the horizon. It was Friday. The Sanhedrin met again to finalize their verdict, Matthew 27:1.

The new day followed a night of mockery and shame. The greatest moment in history had dawned. The worst crime of all time was about to be committed. And the noblest act of self-giving was ready to occur. Both the Jews and the Gentiles took part in condemning the Son of God to the cross.

. The Jews Decided. The meeting during the night was illegal. So the Jewish authorities assembled at sunrise to make their unlawful verdict lawful. In other words, they were careful to look right though they had done wrong. Though shameful, they tried to look shameless.

. The Gentiles Acted. The Jews took Jesus to Pilate. The Lord had predicted it, Matthew 20:18,19. Since the Jews could not execute a criminal, they had to finagle the Romans into doing their dirty work. But, in the process, they kept their distance in order to remain “*ceremonially*” clean (so they could eat the Passover)! John 18:28.

Both the Jews and the Gentiles contributed to the death of the innocent One. Their hands were dirty. Their souls were tarnished. Though ignorant, they were guilty, Acts 3:17.

May we not do like they did. As we come to the table, let us not act righteous while harboring sin in our hearts. God wants pure saints to offer Him praise with unstained hands.

Let us pray for forgiveness before we eat.

THE GUILT

Once Jesus was condemned, Judas realized the enormity of his mistake, Matthew 27:3. *"I have sinned,"* he said, *"I have betrayed innocent blood,"* Matthew 27:4.

Seemingly, Judas had not realized the gravity of his crime. He only considered his own selfish interests. Perhaps, he wished to force the hand of the Lord to use His power to establish His kingdom. Whatever his reason, he seriously miscalculated.

. Judas Was Guilty. He had done evil in hope that good would come from it. Indeed, his mischief issued into giving the world a Savior. But that was not the plan of the traitor.

. Jesus Was Innocent. Judas knew it. Caiaphas realized it. Pilate said it. And even the soldier at Calvary confessed it: *"Surely He was the Son of God,"* Matthew 27:54.

Some people were bewildered by what they saw. Others made fun of Him. No one rescued Him. No one championed His cause. Few, if any, believed in His death. Jesus died a misunderstood man, a mistreated Messiah, a betrayed friend.

Today we assemble to demonstrate our faith, to announce our hope, to confess His deity. God died on the cross. His death purchased our salvation.

We partake of these emblems to acknowledge Him as our Savior. We give visible testimony—by eating this bread and drinking this juice—that He is our Lord and our Redeemer.

Let us affirm that His death was the plan of God.

TOO LATE

When Jesus was taken to Pilate, Judas realized his sin. He was “*seized with remorse*,” Matthew 27:3. He had betrayed an innocent man. But it was too late!

Judas was not a better person because right resulted from his wrong. He was guilty. Could he undo what he had done? He tried.

Judas returned the money. The Sanhedrin snickered. “*That is your responsibility*,” they said, Matthew 27:4. They were right. Returning the silver coins would not fix the mess that he had made.

The King James Version says Judas “*repented*.” Actually, he merely had “a change of feelings.” Repentance unto salvation requires “a change of direction.” Judas merely felt bad. He wished he had not made such a dumb blunder. But returning the money was just as stupid. It was too little too late.

And, when we come to the table, it is too late to return the thirty pieces of silver! We need to change direction before we take the Communion. We need forgiveness. We need to eat the feast with clean hands and a pure heart. That is our responsibility!

It is too late when we eat the bread and drink the cup with sin on our conscience. We need to leave the Supper, be reconciled to God, and return to partake of the bread and juice.

Let us take our responsibility and ask for forgiveness before we partake.

IT IS AS YOU SAY

The Jewish high court leveled a serious political charge against the Messiah: *"He claims to be a king,"* Luke 23:2.

Pilate asked Christ if He was a king. The Lord responded, *"It is as you say!"* Matthew 27:11. Paul, alluding to His clear affirmation, wrote: *"Christ Jesus, while testifying before Pilate, made the good confession,"* I Timothy 6:13.

The Lord was a king. The wise men worshiped Him as a king, Matthew 2:1,2. Nathanael called Him a king, John 1:49. And, in the triumphal entry, the people of Jerusalem welcomed Him as *"the king that comes in the name of the Lord,"* Luke 19:38.

Jesus did not hide the truth. For He went on to say: *"My kingdom is not of this world,"* John 18:36. His kingdom was a spiritual domain.

Jesus is the King of kings. He rules over the hearts of men. Most of His contemporaries misunderstood. They clamored for a physical kingdom. But He reigns from heaven.

As He said, during His ministry, His kingdom is not visible on earth because it is *"within"* us, Luke 17:20,21.

Likewise, many misunderstand the Supper we are about to eat. It is a spiritual meal prepared for spiritual people. We partake with Him. He is present in spirit. He is with us in truth. We eat to remember Him, to honor our king. Only His followers grasp that truth.

Let us worship the King.

INNOCENT

The behavior of Christ was in stark contrast to His accusers. It was easy to see. Many realized that Jesus was innocent.

. *"I find no basis for a charge against this man," Pilate said, Luke 23:4.* The Lord did not oppose paying taxes. *"Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar,"* He instructed, Luke 20:25. The charge of disobeying the Emperor was false.

. *"I have found no basis for your charges against Him," Herod replied, Luke 23:14.* The verdict was clear. The humble rabbi was not a threat. Yet no one had the backbone to release Him!

. *"I find no grounds for the death penalty," Pilate insisted, Luke 23:22.* He announced he would release Christ. But, alas, He who had no sin became sin for us. *"He was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many," Hebrews 9:28.*

It was not fair but it was necessary. For Pilate, it was necessary to pacify an angry mob. It was also necessary for our salvation.

Jesus was innocent. Yet He paid the price. He was sacrificed to bring peace between God and man.

We are beneficiaries of His noble deed. And, in this simple meal, we remember His gift to all who believe.

The unleavened bread symbolizes His body. The fruit of the vine stands for His blood. He gave so that we could receive. No greater sacrifice has EVER been given.

Let us remember the innocent One who died for the guilty.

GLAD TO SEE YOU!

Jesus was taken to Herod—the same man who had murdered John the Baptist. The Lord was an object of curiosity—like a sidewalk clown or circus magician. Herod did not take Christ seriously.

Herod was “*very pleased*” to see the Lord. He wanted the Messiah to entertain him with a miracle, Luke 23:8. He was disappointed. The prisoner ignored Herod. He remained silent, Luke 23:9. Therefore, Herod mocked Him, Luke 23:11.

Our Savior did not come to earth to amuse us. He did not intend to do tricks, to tickle our fancy, or distort the purpose of His mission.

Likewise, the Supper of the Lord was never intended to entertain restless children or satisfy the curiosity of non-Christians. It is a private celebration, a personal expression of our faith in Him who saved us.

We do not gather around this table to be entertained. This is a time of worship. It is a season for reflection. It is an invitation to seriously evaluate our relationship with God.

Therefore, do not approach the Communion as a mechanical observance or an empty ritual. It was not designed to be a mindless ceremony.

The Lord is waiting for us. We must not make fun of Him by an irreverent partaking of His sacred Supper.

Let us bow in prayer as we prepare for the Communion.

ELEGANT ROBES

Jesus was taken to Herod. The tetrarch of Galilee just happened to be in Jerusalem, Luke 23:6.

Herod put a gorgeous robe on Christ in order to insult Him. They pretended to worship the Messiah. They made fun of His claims.

The scene was an insult, a painful affront. They despised the Son of God. He claimed to be a king so they dressed Him up like one. And, then, they laughed. They had their fun. They dismissed Him as a pretender.

He stood before them. He suffered their taunting. He remained silent. Someday the roles will be reversed. They will stand before Him. He will be dressed in splendid garments as the Kings of kings. It will not be a joke. Nobody will be laughing. Then what will those pranksters say?

We must be careful—fully aware of what we are about to do. The Communion is not a time for play-acting.

Jesus is the King. No joke! And He will be the Judge, too. We will stand before Him. He will be in complete control.

We must take the Supper aware of what it is. Otherwise, He is ridiculed who ordained the meal.

We must pledge to remember Him who is our Master. We must be aware of what we are doing, who we are worshiping.

Let us honor the King.

WHO DO YOU WANT?

Pilate wanted to release the Lord. The Sanhedrin wanted Him executed. So Pilate asked the people who they wanted: Barabbas or Jesus? The Jewish Supreme Court “*persuaded them to ask for Barabbas,*” Matthew 27:20.

Barabbas was a criminal. Jesus was innocent. The choice was clear. Yet the people went against their better judgment. They chose the sinner.

. This Event Is A Reflection Of Life. We are confronted with similar choices. Our decision is just as important (and just as clear). We need to consider it carefully.

. It Involves The Issue Of Salvation. The purchase of redemption requires the innocent suffering for the guilty. Jesus took the place of Barabbas. He took our place, too.

But do we prefer Barabbas? Do we prefer the way of evil, the joys of sin for a season? That choice is before us now. As we approach the Supper, we must choose.

Will we commit ourselves to Him? Will we honor the One who died for us? Or will we fake our choice—take the emblems but choose Barabbas? Will we act like a Christian but serve satan?

We can fool ourselves. We can fool others. We cannot fool God. Communion is a fork in the road. We cannot go both ways. A decision is required. We cannot have our cake and eat it, too. Now is the moment of truth.

Let us chose the Messiah.

MOTIVES

Envy is a feeling of discontent. It is resentment toward someone else, a desire to have what they have. The chief priests envied Christ (especially His popularity), Mark 15:9,10.

Pilate recognized their motive. He was an experienced administrator. He read the situation correctly. Though he made many mistakes, this was not one of them.

. Pilate Saw The Envy Of The Priests. They hated the Messiah. The Roman governor may not have grasped the full reason for their envy, but he saw through their pretensions. Yet, since he knew, why did he yield to a misguided motive?

. Pilate Saw The Character Of Christ. He could not help but see the kindness of Jesus. He had already pronounced Him innocent. The governor could see He was a harmless peasant. Pilate knew but crucified Him anyway.

Our guilt is always measured by the actions we take in light of what we know. The priests knew but yielded to envy. Pilate knew but yielded to the angry crowd. We know but what do we do?

The Communion is prepared. We know what it represents. We know what the bread and the juice symbolize. We know—but why do we partake? What is our motive? Do we partake to impress to person near us? Do we merely pretend to be a Christian? Do we partake out of duty? Our motive is as important as our participation.

Let us not disappoint Him nor deceive ourselves.

HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM

During the trial, the wife of Pilate sent him a message. She begged her husband not to have “*anything to do with Him*,” Matthew 27:19. In effect, do nothing that you will regret!

Pontius Pilate was caught between his own conviction and the angry crowd. “*What shall I do, then, with Jesus?*” he asked, Matthew 27:22.

. Some Of Us Share The Same Predicament. What are we going to do with Christ? A verdict must be reached. A judgment must be rendered. We have confessed our allegiance. Will we honor His name (in private and in public)?

. Pilate Attempted To Transfer Responsibility. The Roman governor tried to shift the blame. “*I am innocent of this man’s blood*,” he said. “*It is your responsibility*,” he told the crowd, Matthew 27:24. We often blame others for our own blunders.

What a sad maneuver! In the end, no one was fooled. Pilate certainly did not feel relieved. Six years later he was removed from office. And, in his shame, he committed suicide.

We must be single minded. The true believer gives himself completely to Christ. In the Communion, the heart of the saint is fully focused on the Lord. We want to be His. We want Him to be ours. We have no shame in demonstrating our faith.

What we proclaim in the Supper we declare all week long. Jesus is our Savior. And we are proud to be His children.

Let us honor Him without remorse, reservation, or regret.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

No doubt Pilate was disappointed. The crowd chose Barabbas. So the governor released the notorious criminal. But his dilemma remained. *"What shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"* he asked, Matthew 27:22.

Pilate *"had decided to let Him go,"* Acts 3:13. He tried to shift the burden of deciding to the crowd: *"It is your responsibility,"* he insisted, Matthew 27:24. Pilate tried but he failed. For the buck stopped with him.

Such futility! Such cowardice! The powerful Roman magistrate was a wimp. He wanted to divest himself of any liability. But, in the end, it was his call.

And, when all is said and done, it is our call. It is our responsibility. No one can decide for us. What will we do with Jesus? Supposedly, we made a decision in the past. Supposedly, we confessed that He was the Messiah. Is that still our choice? Do we still cling to Him as our Lord, our King, and our Savior?

The feast divine is a time of renewal—a renewing our pledge of allegiance. What will it be? You must give an answer.

What will I do with Jesus? He waits for me to say. What shall it be? What shall my answer be? He must not be kept waiting. He is knocking at my door. I must tell Him now. I must proclaim my faith. I must own Him as my Master. His nail scared hands are waiting to receive me.

Let us affirm our faith as we pray for the emblems.

HE WASHED HIS HANDS

Pontius Pilate made a feeble effort to protect the Lord. It was at best a half-hearted gesture. He knew Christ was innocent. He had a vague respect for the Messiah. Pilate would have saved Jesus if he could have done so without endangering himself.

But the Roman governor feared the mob. He was concerned about the reaction of Rome. He began to squirm, to retreat from his responsibility. He washed his hands. *"I am innocent,"* he said, Matthew 27:24.

Was he? Did not his proclamation of innocence merely cover up his guilt? Cowardice leads to such contradiction. His hands remained stained with the blood of the innocent One.

Ironically, only the blood of Christ could cleanse those who shed it. Jesus' sacrifice alone could wash away their guilt. Like everyone else, they were *"justified by His blood,"* Romans 5:9.

His blood purifies us, too. But, like those in the first century, we can take an evil pleasure in ignoring the Lord. We can act like the cross does not count. We can take the emblems but overlook their significance. If we do so, are we any different than those who crucified Him?

It is time to search our hearts and examine our minds. It is time to come to the feast with clean hands. Are we ready to partake with pure intentions? An outward ritual does not remove inward stains.

Let us clarify our reasons before we partake.

THE COMPROMISE

The Jews wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate wanted Him released. Two different opinions! Something had to give. A compromise was arranged. The Lord was scourged.

This was a terrible punishment. The victim was tied to a stake or pillar. Then, without any thought of mercy, he was whipped severely. It was common for a prisoner to die under the lash. Jesus survived—though gravely wounded.

. It Was A Cruel Compromise. If Jesus was guilty, He deserved punishment. But, if He was innocent, He should have been spared. Pilate tried to find a suitable middle ground.

. It Was A Painful Decision. The mob wanted blood. The Roman governor gave them their wish. It was not fair. But Pilate hoped it would satisfy them. It did not.

. It Was An Unjust Verdict. Pilate sacrificed the truth. He did so to please the crowd. His decision flew in the face of justice. He allowed hurt. He wounded his own conscience.

We must not compromise the facts. Jesus died for our salvation. His trial was a sham. His pain was real.

We must honor the truth. The Supper of the Lord requires our honesty. He died for our sins. Pilate was wrong. The Jews were blind. The crowd was mistaken. But we must remain true to the facts.

Let us eat the meal without compromise.

CROWN OF THORNS

Palestine was a land of briers. The Roman soldiers had no trouble finding some. They braided a crude crown. It was used to mock Jesus' claim of being a king, Matthew 27:29a.

. The King Suffered. Our Savior was not spared. He came to rule in righteousness but the "powers that be" mocked Him. He came to rule with justice but the unjust laughed at Him. He came to defeat satan. And He did (though the victory cost Him His life).

. The King Reigns. The soldiers did not know it. Yet their cruelty symbolized His royalty. He was the King of kings. He was crowned with thorns. He was ridiculed. But God (eventually) exalted Him, Philippians 2:9. There is no virtue in pain unless it is suffered for a noble cause.

The soldiers may have rethought their mindless mockery. We need to rethink our way of taking the Supper. Does our hurry crown Him with thorns? Does our haste mock Him with a garland of biers? We must reconsider our insult. He deserves more of our time. He deserves our best.

We must not give Him our scraps! No leftovers for Jesus! He is the King. Our best is hardly good enough. He gave His all. We must give Him everything in return.

In this moment, we must banish all thoughts from our minds except our thoughts about Him. Dare we do anything less?

Let us honor our King.

DO NOT WEEP FOR ME

On His way to Calvary, Jesus spoke to some women: “*Do not weep for Me,*” He said. But “*weep for yourselves and for your children,*” Luke 23:28.

The ladies came with kindness. They expressed their compassion at the sad spectacle. The Healer was being hurt. The Life-giver was being killed. What does this suggest?

. He Cared. At a time when He could have been preoccupied with Himself, He cared for others. He saw their tears. He recognized their broken hearts. He consoled them.

. Others Cared. It is hard not to sympathize with the Lord in His final hours. Indeed, it is hard to hold back the tears. But we need not cry for Him. His pain is past. He is on His throne.

. We Should Care. Jesus reminded the women about the fate of their country, Luke 23:29,30. He wanted them to prepare for their own despair. The same applies to us. Are we prepared for the hardships that may come our way?

If men can kill the Son of God, will they have sympathy for His followers? Luke 23:31. Nations go from bad to worse, from dark to darker. We must prepare for the bumpy road ahead.

We take the Communion to celebrate His victory. We partake to get ready for our triumph. Beyond the misery of today, there is a great banquet tomorrow. Be ready. The Lord has blazed the trial.

Let us “weep for ourselves!”

CRUCIFY HIM!

The event is told in a few words. There was no effort to describe the gory details. The power of Rome was ambushed by the hatred of the Jews. *"They crucified Him,"* Mark 15:24a.

. The Cross Was Heavy. Jesus was exhausted. He fell on the way to Golgotha. A man from Africa was commanded to finish carrying the cross to Calvary, Mark 15:21. Simon (and his sons) became ardent followers of the Lord.

. The Nails Were Driven. The actual crucifixion was completed in a couple of minutes. The agony lasted six hours. Jesus had said—when I am lifted up—we would know *"He was who He claimed to be,"* John 8:28. And we do!

. A Sign Was Written. It was common to attach a sign to the cross. It spelled out the crime. Jesus' sign said: *"THE KING OF THE JEWS."* The enemies of Christ protested. Pilate had the last word: *"What I have written I have written,"* John 19:22.

. The Mockery Continued. The insults added to His misery. *"He saved others. Let Him save Himself,"* Luke 23:35. The scoffing must have hurt as much as the nails. But He endured.

He paid our penalty. That was the plan all along. The crowd misunderstood. The Jews did not care. Pilate was a pawn. But we glory in the cross of Christ. It is our salvation.

We eat the Supper to remember. He died so that we can live. We are thankful for the cross. We cannot be saved without it.

Let us rejoice in His awesome gift.

PAIN KILLER

"They offered Him wine mixed with myrrh." The drink was a strong narcotic. It would dull the pain. *"But He did not take it,"* Mark 15:23.

Jesus did not seek to alleviate the hurt. He bore the full brunt of our penalty. Was that not His reason for going to Calvary?

The Gospel of Matthew called it *"vinegar mingled with gall,"* Matthew 27:34. This refers to its taste. It was a gesture of grace. As the Scriptures say, *"Give strong drink to those who are perishing.... Let them remember their misery no more,"* Proverbs 31:6,7.

His prayer in Gethsemane stands in stark contrast to His refusal at Golgotha. In the olive grove, Jesus asked that His sufferings to be removed. But, when He realized it was will of God, He readily accepted them. Christ was human in shrinking from crucifixion. He was divine in embracing it.

When the hour of destiny was upon Him, He did not flinch. He did not cower or cringe. Christ took our place. He was brave, determined, and triumphant. He became a perfect Savior through what He suffered, Hebrews 5:8.

Are we willing to suffer for Him? A good place to start is at the table of the Lord. We should focus our minds on His sacrifice like He focused His mind on our redemption. We should give Him our life knowing He gave His life for us.

Let us refuse the opiate of inattention.

GOLGOTHA

The term Golgotha means “*the skull*” in Aramaic, Luke 23:33. Calvary is the Latin term for “*a skull*.” Some assume the hill where the crucifixion occurred had a skull shape. Perhaps!

It was outside the wall of Jerusalem, Hebrews 13:12. Likely it was near a path, Mark 15:29a. The tomb was also near by, John 19:41. Christians had no interest in preserving the actual site until the fourth century. By then, the exact place was unknown.

Just as well! For the death of our Lord is remembered on every continent. It is more important that people know why He died rather than where He died.

Christ suffered death so that we might live. He gave His life for those who had lost all hope of living. Death was abolished for those who believe. The corruptible will put on the incorruptible. The mortal will be exchanged for immortality, I Corinthians 15:53.

Indeed, where He died is of no consequence. Why He died means everything. We are not saved by visiting the site but by accepting the purpose of His sacrifice.

He died at a place called the skull. Many died there. Only one of those deaths redeems us.

We eat the bread and drink the juice. We do so to acknowledge His death for us. We partake to confirm His promises.

Let us focus on why He died.

LAST WORDS

The Gospels record seven things Jesus said while on the cross. We call them His “last words.”

1. Forgive Them, Luke 23:34a. The soldiers were unaware of the sin they had committed. Yet it was still a sin.
2. You Shall Be With Me, Luke 23:43. One of the robbers—who was crucified with Christ—made amends before he died.
3. Behold Your Mother, John 19:26,27. As the eldest son, Jesus was responsible to care for Mary. He did.
4. Why Have You Forsaken Me, Mark 15:34,35. The Lord felt abandoned. And He was. God had (temporarily) left Him.
5. I Am Thirsty, John 19:28. Fainting from the loss of blood, He needed water. He was close to the finish line.
6. It Is Finished, John 19:30. He fulfilled His mission. Though evil men tried to prevent it, He went the distance.
7. I Commit My Spirit, Luke 23:46. No one took His life. He laid it down on His own, John 10:18. He was in control.

What will our last words be? Will we remain faithful? We must. For our end is really our beginning.

Each week we prepare for that transition. We remember His sacrifice. It is one of the ways we put “our house in order.”

Let us be faithful to the very end.

BETWEEN CRIMINALS

Jesus was crucified “*between*” two convicts, John 19:18. According to Roman law, crucifixion was reserved for the worst of criminals—traitors, bandits, and murderers. Christ was “*numbered with transgressors*,” Isaiah 53:12b.

The insult was intended. After all, Jesus claimed to be what the authorities assumed He was not. Therefore, in their eyes, He was a thief.

However, He admitted to being a king—because He was the King of kings, I Timothy 1:17; Revelation 17:14. Their affront backfired!

Certainly, when He died, He did not look like a powerful ruler. But, when we see Him again, He will appear in His majesty. He is the “*King of kings and Lord of lords*,” I Timothy 6:15. Therefore, at His second coming, we shall see the Messiah as He is, I John 3:2.

“*The pure in heart*” will see Him, Matthew 5:8. Hence, we praise Him now in anticipation of seeing Him later. If we believe His crucifixion, we will rejoice in His coronation. If we do not, nothing else matters.

Can we see what His crucifiers failed to recognize? He is the Ruler of the universe. He has “*all authority in heaven and on earth*,” Matthew 20:18. “*To Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*,” Revelation 1:6.

Let us recognize our King as we partake.

FORGIVE THEM

When He was being nailed to the cross, the Lord said, “*Forgive them,*” Luke 23:34. In a moment of excruciating pain, He showed mercy to those who had no mercy for Him.

What an example! He forgave their cruelty. He forgot Himself. He loved His enemies. He did what needed to be done.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, “*Pray for those who persecute you,*” Matthew 5:44. He did. He wants us to do the same. The challenge is huge. We must take up our cross and follow Him!

This is not optional. It is the will of God. He wants us to go the second mile, to do the unexpected. It is not easy. It is not natural. But it is required. Believers do not hold grudges. They do not nurse ill will. They do not practice “an eye for an eye.” They are motivated by the example of their Master.

We eat the bread. We drink the juice. We remember the way He died. We recall the way He loved those who despised Him. We forgive like He forgave.

The Communion is more than a memorial. It is a vow—a vow to be kind, to turn the other cheek, to love the unlovely, to do to others what we wish they would do to us.

The Supper is more than what He did. It is what we must do. We should refuse the emblems if we do not take His example seriously.

Let us open our minds that mercy may fill our hearts.

KEPT WATCH

There were no chairs or benches at Calvary. So the soldiers sat on the ground. It was the boring part of their job. They were there to keep watch so that no one removed Christ from the cross, Matthew 27:36.

Crucifixion was a slow death. Sometimes it took days for the victims to die. So the soldiers occupied themselves with light conversation and simple games.

We know now what those soldiers did not know then. They were observing the most momentous event in history. Likely, they treated it as just another drab assignment.

The cross is to those who are perishing the foolishness of faith, I Corinthians 1:18. The whole idea of salvation through crucifixion was offensive to them. Among Christians, however, it is the gift of God.

We keep watch. We defend the necessity of His death. We believe we are reconciled to God “*through His blood shed on the cross*,” Colossians 1:20. He endured that agony for us. Hence, we do “*not grow weary or lose heart*,” Hebrews 12:2,3.

The Supper of the Lord is our watchtower. We observe our dying Savior. Each week we proclaim our faith in His death. The bread symbolizes His body. The fruit of the vine represents His blood. Together they show our confidence in His death. They announce our hope of eternal life. We do not grow weary. We refuse to lose heart.

Let us demonstrate our belief in Calvary.

THE ROBE

Roman law allowed the soldiers who were involved in a crucifixion to divide the clothes of the victim, John 19:23. One might assume that there were four soldiers in that military detail (since they divided Jesus' clothes into "*four shares*").

His tunic was "*seamless*." They did not want to tear it. So they caste lots to decide who would get His robe, John 19:24a. This incident is the sole redeeming element in that sad affair.

In effect, as soon as He was crucified, the soldiers focused on their reward. The love of things is always in a hurry. Dare we take the Supper that way?

The whole scene was a fulfillment of Scripture, John 19:24b,c. The soldiers had no intention of doing the will of God. They simply presumed they were crucifying a criminal. Yet their actions confirmed that Christ was the Messiah!

The robe eventually lost its meaning. It soon became a worthless bloodstained rag (though the One who wore it is remembered as a Savior). We still keep a feast in His honor.

We think of His sacrifice. We thank Him for taking our place. We rejoice that He is our Master. We meditate on His greatness. We wish to be clothed in His likeness.

We take the emblems to help us recall Calvary. Like the robe, the bread and the juice are of little value—but they point to the glory of His giving everything He owned.

Let us worship the greatness of the Person who wore that robe.

INSULTS

The place of execution was next to a path. People were hurrying in and out of Jerusalem, Matthew 27:39. Some of them mocked the Lord.

The insults fulfilled prophecy, Psalm 22:6-8. The crowd did not care. They scorned Him who was dying for them. *“He saved others but cannot save Himself!”* they shouted. *“He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him,”* Matthew 27:42,43.

If Jesus had come down from the cross, it would not have proven His deity. His resurrection did. He endured the ridicule. He accepted the shame. And now He is sitting at the right hand of the Almighty in heaven, Hebrews 12:2.

Is this not an example for us? We will be scorned. People will laugh. Our faith will be made fun of. If we act like a Christian, sooner or later we will be treated like Christ. Yet *“it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering,”* 1 Peter 2:21.

The Communion can spark such mockery. Rome accused believers of being cannibals. The world may call us fanatics. So be it. We stay the course. We keep the faith. We take the emblems. We remember the sacrifice of our Lord.

We accept the consequences. We endure the mockery. He did. We should. Soon we will sing with the angels: *“Worthy is the Lamb!”* Revelation 5:12.

Let us honor the One who was insulted.

SAVE YOURSELF

The name “*Jesus*” meant “the Lord saves,” Matthew 1:21. Perhaps, the insult “*save Yourself*” is a play on the meaning of His name. Certainly He saved others from deadly diseases. Could He not save Himself? It did not seem like He could!

The crowd wanted a demonstration of His self-saving power. “*Come down from the cross*,” they shouted, Mark 15:30. Indeed, He rescued others. And, while they mocked, He was rescuing them! In other words, their insult was premature.

What they said was like a victory cry before the battle was over. In truth, they spoke too soon.

If the outcome that day was measured at sunset, it certainly appeared that the forces of evil had won. Ironically, people now call that day “Good Friday.” Actually, it did not seem very good at the time.

But what a difference three days can make! God must not be measured in the short term. The ridicule at the crucifixion was transformed into worship. The tomb became empty. Early Sunday morning the echoes of “HE HAS RISEN” bounced off of the surrounding hills. Yes! “*He saved Himself!*”

And He saved us, too. He gave His body for our redemption. He shed His blood for our salvation. The Supper of the Lord is a memorial to His power. We do not have to save ourselves. He did that for us.

Let us praise Him for rescuing us.

THE DEBATE

An intense debate occurred at Calvary. The two thieves argued over how to address Christ, Luke 23:39-41. One thief taunted Him. The other respected Him.

It was an interesting exchange. Though it took place in the first century, it has been discussed many times since. For, the first thief doubted the deity of Jesus. The other criminal believed.

A short time earlier, these robbers had been in a prison cell. Now they were facing death on a cross. In other words, it was time to embrace reality. What was next? Where would they go after they died?

At such times, the mind can be awakened to flashes of truth. Human understandings can be altered. For example, one thief asked Jesus to remember him “*when He came into His kingdom,*” Luke 23:42.

He recognized the power of God. He realized his sin. He saw the excellence of the Lord. He believed in the divinity of Christ.

Likewise, the Communion can be that flash of reality. Those who have not asked Christ to “*remember them*” need to do so. And, those who have put their faith in Jesus should anticipate being with Him in His kingdom.

Our participation in the Supper is our acknowledgement of His deity. Paradise is our next stop, Luke 23:43. Are we ready to go?

Let us worship Him who waits for us when we die.

DARKNESS

It was noon. A surreal darkness covered the land, Matthew 27:45. Like His birth, His death was accompanied by a supernatural event. Some saw the darkness as a sign of divine anger. Others considered it the withdrawal of God from Calvary. Certainly everyone noticed.

Like the darkness before the exodus, the darkness when Jesus was on the cross was an equally awesome event, cf. Exodus 10:21-23. Something had happened beyond their control. Everyone cringed.

“The Light of the world” was dying. But the world did not comprehend the significance, cf. John 1:4,5. The crucifixion is one of many mysteries surrounding the God-man.

God became man (though we do not fully understand). Faith fills the gap. We wait for a clarification. In due time, *“we will know even as we are known,”* I Corinthians 13:12.

The darkness was not a meaningless event. The same is true of the Supper. We grasp its obvious significance (though we stagger under the burden to completely explain it).

The bread speaks of His broken body. The fruit of the vine points to His shed blood. These details I understand. How His death washes away my sin is beyond my full comprehension.

I do not need to know everything. The Lord will explain the deeper issues in due time. For now, I know enough.

Let us trust as we partake.

FORSAKEN

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus uttered a loud cry. Speaking to God, He said, "*Why have You forsaken Me?*" Matthew 27:46,47. Some misunderstood what He said. If He was speaking in Aramaic, that could have caused the confusion.

Christ quoted Psalm 22. What He actually meant we do not know. Likely, it was prompted by more than physical anguish. His words were caused by spiritual heaviness. The light of divine presence had been withdrawn. Jesus suffered alone. His feelings of abandonment were real.

Did God leave Him? Did the Almighty turn His face from the One who "*became sin*" for us? Did God leave His Son alone? Is so, no wonder He shouted in soul-wrenching agony.

Under similar conditions, we would, too. To feel forsaken by God, is to realize we are on our own.

Therefore, it is good to remember what He said to those who followed Him. "*I will be with you always to the end of this age,*" Matthew 28:20. And, again, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,*" Hebrews 13:5.

That is a promise. It is a promise He keeps. The Communion is a reminder of His commitment. He is with us now. His presence is guaranteed.

We eat the bread and drink the cup with Him. He is here! He repeatedly whispers those words: "*I will never leave you. I will NEVER forsake you.*" What a blessed assurance!

Let us pray that we will never forsake Him.

THE CURTAIN

It was the Passover. Lambs were being slaughtered throughout Jerusalem. And, ironically, at the same time, the Lamb of God was dying on Calvary.

No doubt the priests had entered the temple. And, to their shock, the veil—between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place—was “*torn in two*,” Matthew 27:51.

That event had a special meaning. God was present in the Most Holy Place. Up until the tearing of the curtain, only the High Priest could stand before God (for a short time) once a year. But, since the veil was lying in a heap on the floor, all believers could enter the throne room of God, Hebrews 10:19-22.

The curtain in the temple was thick and strong. Yet it was ripped like a piece of paper from “*top to bottom*.” Only the hand of God could have done that. The priests in the temple must have been stunned by the spectacle.

Now we have access to God every day. Around the clock, we can tell Him “all about our troubles.” He waits to hear from us.

And, given the promise of the Lord, He attends the Communion when we partake. We do not worship alone.

So it is time to enter our Most Holy Place. The Communion is where we can enjoy His presence, follow His lead, and allow Him to carry our load.

Let us enter our Most Holy Place.

IT IS FINISHED

The purpose for coming to earth was completed. Every prophecy had been fulfilled. His suffering for our sins was over. The end had come. *"It is finished,"* He said, John 19:30.

The moment Jesus had been waiting for had arrived. Earlier, in the upper room, Christ had told His Father, *"I am coming to You,"* John 17:13. His time to go back to heaven was at hand. His reason for being on earth was done. Nothing remained except for Him to die.

"It is finished" are welcome words. Our salvation was complete. He had fully paid our ransom. He asked us to trust Him. He was ready to exchange the mockery for honor, the crown of thorns for a victory garland, and the temporary pain for eternal praise.

If He was satisfied with His effort, should we not be also? If the Father accepted His sacrifice, should we not accept it, too?

Life on this side was done. Life on the other side was ready to continue. He had been there before. He was ready to return.

The Supper of the Lord is our way of saying *"it is finished."* The arrangements are made. Our "mansion over the hilltop" is ready. We are close to the end.

We take the emblems to remain strong, to finish the race, to keep the faith.

Let us pray for endurance to complete our assignment like He completed His.

HE GAVE UP HIS SPIRIT

The Lord spoke His last words: *“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,”* Luke 23:45. In effect, He gave His life to God.

That was His “farewell to earth” and His “hello to heaven.” For those who are unprepared, falling into the hands of God *“is a dreadful thing,”* Hebrews 10:31. For Christ, it was a glad reunion.

Everyone dies. The Lord died in full control of His life. The bystanders had shouted, *“Save yourself.”* He did! In the hands of the Almighty, He was gently taken to the realms above.

His passing was the picture of tranquility. He rested in the assurance of divine love. No trashing about. No refusing to surrender. No resistance to dying. Christ calmly gave Himself to God. We should live so that we can die like He died.

Our sins have been washed away. Our pardon is issued. We have nothing to fear. We have no reason to hesitate. The Lord *“stands”* waiting for us to come home, cf. Acts 7:55,56.

Our passing from earth is our going to heaven. It is completing our journey that we started at baptism. It is exchanging the gloom of this dark world for the celestial bliss of our eternal abode.

The Communion prepares us for this final trip. It is a weekly rehearsal of our last lap. As we commit our life each week in taking the emblems, we practice committing our spirit to God.

Let us entrust ourselves to Him who waits for us.

SON OF GOD

A centurion was the commander of a group of soldiers. There was a centurion at the crucifixion. No doubt he had seen many executions. It was part of his job.

But, somehow, Jesus was different. The situation surrounding His death was unusual. Everyone noticed.

There was darkness. There was an earthquake. Obviously Christ was no ordinary mortal. The centurion saw it. He felt it. He exclaimed, *"Surely He was the Son of God,"* Matthew 27:54.

What the centurion meant is difficult to say. The words *"Son of God"* had various meanings. Yet, that soldier could see that the Lord was different. Christians interpret his words as an affirmation of deity.

It was a startling scene. Everyone was moved. And, as Jesus predicted, when He was lifted up, others would know that He was who He claimed to be, John 8:28. Indeed, He was the Son of God.

If a Roman soldier could see His godliness, surely we can, too. In the bread and in the fruit of the vine, we get a glimpse of who He was.

Christ is our King. He is our Savior. The giving of Himself on our behalf is the work of God. His death saves. His crucifixion is our ransom. Truly, He was and is the Son of God.

Let us thank the Father for giving us His Son.

HE WAS RIGHTEOUS

According to the Gospel of Luke, when the centurion realized Jesus had died, he said, “*Surely this was a righteous man,*” Luke 23:47. Regardless of what others might have said, Christ was a good person.

The noble conduct of our Savior made a huge impression. He died without fear. He faced the unknown like He knew what was ahead. Three times, while on the cross, Christ talked to His Father.

Our death should be a validation of our faith. In our final moments, should we not act like we are acquainted with God? Should we not show that our righteousness is genuine?

He who was considered righteous, was “*without sin,*” Hebrews 4:15. No pretending. No play-acting. No make believe. He was the real deal.

And, if anything is said at my funeral, I hope it is said that I was a Christian! I want to live and die like a true believer.

Part of that genuine lifestyle is taking the Communion with a genuine reverence. With head bowed and eyes closed, I meditate on His death, I imitate His sincerity, and I follow His lead.

If I cannot be sincere in taking the emblems, how will I be when I take my last breath? How will I act when I slide into eternity? We prepare now for what will happen soon.

Let us eat and drink like we are in the very presence of the Lord.

THEY WENT AWAY

It was over. Jesus was dead. And, when the crowd realized He was gone, "*they went away*," Luke 23:48.

The people returned to their familiar routines. The sight of a dying Messiah was replaced by the duties of daily life. The present eclipsed the future.

Time moved on!

For many, Christ was forgotten. The feelings of remorse subsided. Making money and keeping the house took over. The physical smothered the spiritual. Work replaced worship. The little things of time overshadowed the big things of eternity.

Life is like that.

The hassles of living command our attention. We spend most of our waking hours occupied in the do-dads of daily living. God gets the scraps.

Instead of staying with the Lord, we go back to our old ways, to the here-and-now. We take the emblems and quickly return to the mundane. Do we act like the present is all that matters?

They were moved by the moment. We are, too. But our thoughts of the crucified Lord recede into the background.

Should it be that way? Can we not stay close to Him all week?

Let us remain with the Lord both now and the rest of the week.

THEY WERE THERE

When the crowd left, the women stayed, Matthew 27:55. Five of them are mentioned by name. They had followed Jesus from Galilee, Luke 23:49. They cared for His needs, Mark 15:41.

Yes! They were there when they crucified the Lord! They remained faithful until He died. They stuck with Him through thick and thin.

The women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. They watched Him being removed from Calvary. They saw Him being placed in the grave. They immediately made plans to embalm His body, Luke 23:56.

They may have seen the stone rolled over the door. They may have seen the soldiers come to guard the body of the deceased.

Why were they there? They may have wondered: “*Now what?*” Thankfully, they knew where the body was buried. And, three days later, they were able to tell the disciples that the grave was empty!

I am grateful for these women. They did a huge service for the world. They witnessed what no one else saw. And through them, we can be there, too.

The Communion takes us back to the upper room, the olive grove, the trial, the crucifixion, and the burial. We can visualize these historic events because eyewitnesses were there! And, through the Supper, we can be there, too.

Let us remember as we partake.

SECRETLY

Joseph of Arimathea was a “closet” believer. He was like Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night, John 3:1,2. Joseph “*secretly*” sought permission to bury Jesus, John 19:38,39.

He was a member of the Sanhedrin. He earnestly “*waited for the kingdom*.” He had not consented to the crucifixion, Luke 23:51. But he “*boldly*” petitioned Pilate, Mark 15:43.

The cross brings out curious contrasts in conduct. Two of Jesus’ closest disciples betrayed Him. Two of His distant followers stepped forward to bury Him. Cowardice and courage has been displayed throughout history.

Doubtless many are courageous at church (though they shrink back in the marketplace). Joseph and Nicodemus were quiet in the crowd (though bold when it counted).

It is not for me to judge. I am profoundly grateful for their example. What would I have done under their circumstances? I believe that on the Judgment Day their voices will ring with confidence in the One that they buried.

The reluctant are still genuine disciples when the “chips are down.” Yes, they may fear public repercussions. But an open confession is no more a guarantee of faith than secrecy is a lack of it.

The brash and the bashful are welcome at the table. God loves them both. This is the hour in which we can grow in faith.

Let us commune in confidence.

THEY WERE TERRIFIED

When Jesus died, the soldiers “*were terrified*,” Matthew 27:54. Other translations say they “*were filled with awe*.”

Certainly they were deeply moved. They had already said He was “*innocent*,” Luke 23:47, and that He was “*the Son of God*,” Mark 15:39. Then there was darkness and an earthquake!

They had reviled Him while He hung on the cross, Luke 23:36a. Yet, later, after watching Him suffer, they changed their minds. His strength was unbroken. His spirit was unyielding.

The soldiers were not believers. Likely, they had not met Christ before Calvary. They had seen many deaths. They killed many people. Yet the Lord affected them deeply.

The transformation of the soldiers was dramatic. The truth pierced their hearts. They had never witnessed a death like His. They would never see another crucifixion like it.

He did not waver. He did not break. He did not surrender. He won. He triumphed over His pain. And, in the process, He saved all who trust in Him.

The Supper is a celebration of that victory. It is a memorial to His stunning achievement. For, without His death, where would we be? It is frightening to think of that possibility.

If the soldiers can see the deity of a dying man, can we not see the deity in a living Lord?

Let us yield to Him who triumphed over death.

AFTER EFFECTS

When Jesus died, the earthquake “*broke open*” the tombs in the nearby cemetery, Matthew 27:52.

Nature attested to the historic event that had just happened. And, when Christ returned from the dead, another “*violent earthquake*” occurred, Matthew 28:2.

These earthquakes indicated the presence of the Almighty. Death silenced the Son of God. So the Father “spoke.”

When the curious went to the graveyard (to see the empty tomb of Jesus), they also noticed the other burial chambers. So, upon returning to the city, they mention what they saw “*to many people*,” Matthew 27:53.

Their message was convicting. Something beyond the ordinary had occurred. The earthquakes helped discouraged believers gain new hope. Jesus was the “*firstborn from the dead*,” Colossians 1:18. Others would follow in His wake. Indeed, there was life after death!

The Supper conveys a grand truth. Our Savior died. But He lives again. And we will, too. Death is not the end. Our grave is not our “final resting place.”

We partake to remember. He is returning soon. We wait. We scan the sky anticipating His appearance. That is what we proclaim when we eat the bread and drink the cup. He is the firstborn. We will follow in His footsteps.

Let us prepare ourselves for the great reunion.

PARTICIPATION

When we partake of the bread and the fruit of the vine, it is a “*participation*,” I Corinthians 10:16. The word “participate” is also the term for “fellowship,” that is, “to share,” Romans 8:17. The Supper of the Lord is an act of sharing.

. The Communion Is A Christian Ceremony. Pagans did not invent it. It came directly from Jesus. It was not a copy. It is an original. It was exclusively from Christ for His followers. It was given to Christians to share with each other.

. The Communion Recognizes The Death Of Christ. The focus is on the sacrifice of the Messiah. All who partake agree that it is a fellowship with Him. This participation is the privilege of every believer. No exceptions! No exclusions!

. The Communion Is An Act Of Fellowship. The Eucharist reflects the nature of the church. It is a family reunion. We share in the love of Christ. The “*one loaf*” symbolizes the “*one body*” to which we belong, I Corinthians 10:17.

So, as we participate, we should embrace the full meaning of the Supper. To do so, we must put away other activities, set aside other thoughts, and abandon other concerns. We need to pay close attention to what is being done.

Anything less will be short of the mark. Anything more will be beyond what was intended. This is a sacred gathering of the family of God. Jesus is the host and we are the guests. Our participation is a demonstration of our unity.

Let us share.

WHOSE TABLE?

Some of the members of the church in Corinth were attending pagan feasts. They were eating food offered to idols.

Paul said, *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons,"* I Corinthians 10:21. It was impossible to have part in both the table of the Lord and the table of the devil.

We cannot serve two masters. Either we will hate the one and love the other or we will be devoted to the one and despise the other, Matthew 6:24. We must make up our minds. Whose table will we honor? Whose food will we eat?

In the Supper of the Lord, we must give total attention to Christ. A divided faith is a weak faith. Jesus is not content with partial loyalty. He does not accept fragmentary faith. He gave His all to us. He expects us to give our all to Him.

Those who commune should have one focus, one aim. We share a common impulse, a similar intent. The Son of God is our only Lord and Savior.

In order to partake of the Supper, we should be single-minded. In order to worship God, the Christian must be completely committed.

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God," I Corinthians 10:31. In other words, worship Him *"acceptably with reverence and awe,"* Hebrews 12:28.

Let us gather at the table of the Lord.

JEALOUSY

It is a serious matter to provoke God. He will not tolerate such behavior. Yet we can “*arouse the jealousy of the Lord*” by abusing the Communion service, I Corinthians 10:22a.

The Ten Commandments mention stirring up the jealousy of God, Exodus 20:5; cf. Deuteronomy 32:21. And, in a similar manner, our minds can be drawn away from Christ.

During the Supper, our worship belongs exclusively to Jesus. Nothing must intrude on our fellowship with Him. Nothing must challenge our bond of allegiance. He expects total loyalty.

It is an awful thing to divide our attention. It fails to honor Him. It can disturb fellow worshippers. It provokes the jealousy of heaven. It can lead to spiritual disaster.

Can a person focus on this world while attempting to acknowledge the Lord? Can we entertain secular ideas and expect to grow spiritually? Can we occupy our minds with the stuff of this life and expect to be ready for the next life?

Those who ignore the effects of careless worship will reap unpleasant results. They are double-minded—going in two directions and getting nowhere!

The Supper of the Lord requires mental discipline. If we met Christ, would we ignore Him? Would we turn our attention to other things? It is easy to do. Dare we provoke Him? “*Are we stronger than He?*” I Corinthians 10:22b.

Let us partake with our minds completely focused on the Lord.

MORE HARM THAN GOOD

The way the Corinthians took the Lord's Supper "*did more harm than good*," I Corinthians 11:17.

. Going To Church Was Harmful. Careless intentions resulted in bad outcomes. People were forced into segregated groups based on income. The worship services did not allow them to mix-and-mingle. The Communion did not demonstrate their oneness in Christ. There were unwholesome divisions among them, I Corinthians 11:18.

. Worshipping Together Was A Distraction. Devotion must be nurtured. The place is neutral. The process is essential. Therefore, do everything that gives glory to God and creates awe in the hearts of those assembled. A divided church cannot keep a unity feast. Distracted worship cannot nurture a pleasant fellowship.

. Taking Communion Was Punishment. The Eucharist should be a high point in coming together. But it can be a low point, too. So it was for the Corinthians. It resulted in some getting "*drunk*," I Corinthians 11:21. It caused the Church of God to be "*despised*." The poorer brethren were "*humiliated*," I Corinthians 11:22. What an unbelievable travesty!

It happened in the first century. It has happened many times since. Churches can be careless. They can give little thought to the sacredness of the Supper. The meal becomes routine, an irreverent ritual done in mindless haste, to the detriment of all who partake. IT DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD!

Let us honor God and edify each other.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

As far as we know, Paul is the first person to use the phrase “*Lord’s Supper*,” I Corinthians 11:20. That simple designation has profound implications.

The Supper belongs to Christ. It focuses on a divine Person. It involves remembering His sacrifice. Hence, the Supper is from Him, for Him, about Him, and to Him. He is the centerpiece of the ceremony.

There is no doubt about the authenticity of the Communion. It was first observed in the upper room. The church has kept it ever since. We continue to do so every Sunday.

. The Lord’s Supper Is Sacred. Jesus intended for us to keep the Holy Meal. We need to be reminded of our salvation. The ritual does not redeem. It is the One we remember that redeems. We partake to proclaim His death. We do so to recall the price He paid “*once for all*,” Hebrews 10:10.

. The Lord’s Supper Is Special. It is not a six-course meal. Neither is it a trivial snack. The bread and the juice are not changed into the literal body and blood of Christ. The elements remain the same. The worshipper is the one that is transformed. We grow spiritually when we partake sincerely.

The Lord’s Supper is heaven’s meal to be done in heaven’s way. No additions. No subtractions. No revisions. The Scriptures are clear. If the partaker follows the simple instructions, God is pleased.

Let us treat the Supper as a sacred meal.

HERESIES

When it came to the Communion, the Corinthians observed the Supper in a “heretical” way, I Corinthians 11:19. In Greek, the term “*heresy*” means “differences,” “divisions,” or “factions.” They had adopted a practice that divided the congregation.

The first century world was full of warring parties. There was the “*party of the Sadducees*,” Acts 5:17, and the “*party of the Pharisees*,” Acts 15:5. And, in addition, the early believers were called “*the sect of the Nazarene*,” Acts 24:5,14.

The Corinthians were splitting the local Body of Christ—the very sin they were supposed to denounce. They were driving a wedge between the rich and the poor.

Members sang the same hymns and heard the same sermons. But they were relegated into separate groups during the meal. They were brothers in part of the service and strangers in the other part. How could they allow such a thing to happen?

Division was condemned, Galatians 5:19,20; Titus 3:10; II Peter 2:1. Hersey did not belong in the family of God.

If we are about to partake of the emblems, but realize we have something against a brother, we should fix the problem before we continue, cf. Matthew 5:23,24.

Dare we deviate from the intention of the Almighty? Dare we allow factions in the church? Dare we be part of the handiwork of the devil? No! May it never be so!

Let us be united in taking the Supper.

IN REMEMBRANCE

The purpose of the Supper is to recall the death of Christ. It is a memorial, I Corinthians 11:25.

We eat the bread and drink the juice to remember. We think of the broken body and the shed blood. His sacrifice satisfied the justice of God. Heaven offers redemption through the cross. By His death, we are *"healed,"* I Peter 2:24.

The Supper addresses our memory. It awakens thoughts of rescue, recalls the price of redemption. Perception, imagination, and recall are all parts of memory. Everyone remembers something. Christians remember the cost of their salvation. It is a priceless thought.

Memory is an important building block of religion. It calls to mind the fall and the rescue of humankind. It serves as a reminder of our peace with God, our hope for eternal life. Remembrance is the foundation of the Communion.

The motivation for and blessedness of the Supper is the remembrance of His grace. Christ as God, Christ as Messiah, and Christ as our substitute is the heart of the Lord's Supper.

"Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus commanded. It must not become a side issue, a secondary concern, or a lesser detail.

I invite everyone to observe a quiet time, to reminisce, to focus on Calvary. There is nothing more important, nothing more urgent than recalling the price paid for our reconciliation.

Let us take time to be holy.

COVENANT IN HIS BLOOD

The Jews had a covenant with God. That agreement lasted for thousands of years. The fruit of the vine represents a new covenant in Jesus' blood, I Corinthians 11:25.

At baptism, we entered into that covenant with the Lord—an agreement of pardon and obedience. Hence, when we drink the cup today, we renew that promise with Him. And He renews His promise with us.

In the ancient world, covenants were exceedingly important. People could not go through life without making agreements with their trusted allies. These arrangements guaranteed a measure of safety and predictability.

But covenants always involved the shedding of blood. In some cases, the covenant makers cut themselves. In other situations, the constituents ate a meal (that required the death of an animal). In either case, blood was shed.

Every Sunday we acknowledge the agreement we have with God. We reaffirm our faithful keeping of His commandments. And the Almighty reaffirms His promise of redemption.

The Supper of the Lord is not a funeral. It is a proclamation that we have an agreement with heaven. It is a pledge of loyalty—made by God and us to each other. It is a public testimony of our friendship. It is a happy expectation of being with the Lord soon in the sweet by and by.

Let us be faithful covenant keepers.

A PROCLAMATION

“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes,” I Corinthians 11:26. In effect, the Communion is an announcement. We are declaring that Christ died, He arose, and He will return.

The Corinthians had made the table into a secular celebration, a segregated assembly, and a booze party. Their Communion service was a drunken, divisive gathering, I Corinthians 11:21. The highest mystery of the faith became a sinner’s delight!

Paul begged for a spiritually dignified celebration. The emblems were to declare the sacred news of Jesus’ death.

How easy it is to lose sight of such an important event. Though a simple observance, it is a significant ceremony. The Eucharist not only recalls a historic fact but a pivotal doctrine.

Generation after generation has announced the vicarious death of the Lord. When we partake in a reverent manner, the world will catch a glimpse of the Good News. Though silent, we speak. Though quiet, we preach.

Does our demeanor proclaim the death of Christ? Do we announce His return? If unbelievers watched us, would they be convinced that what we were doing was important, worthy of attention?

In the Communion, we should look back to Calvary and forward to His coming again.

Let us announce our faith.

PERILS OF THE SUPPER

The Supper of the Lord can be observed in an “*unworthy manner*,” I Corinthians 11:27. The Christians at Corinth were guilty. They took the sacred food in a sinful fashion.

Corinth was a wicked city. Some of that wickedness seeped into the Supper. The sacred was mixed with sin. Truth was overcome by error.

In this ancient Greek metropolis, the devil reigned. The community of believers was infected with motions of doing as they pleased. Heaven was not happy.

In one sense, we are all unworthy. Everyone who partakes is a penitent sinner. It is only by divine grace that we had been invited to share in His banquet. But forgiven sinners are not to act like heathens at the Supper.

We are expected to behave appropriately. We must take the emblems with due regard for God and each other. We cannot hug sin and embrace Jesus. We cannot kiss the devil and love our brethren. The Eucharist requires a deliberate choice.

We ought to “*examine*” ourselves, I Corinthians 11:28. We need to search our souls and check our reasons for partaking. We should receive the emblems with humility, act like a child of God, and refrain from condemning ourselves.

We are held accountable. We are called to participate with appropriate behavior. We must eat His meal with pure hands.

Let us partake in a worthy manner.

EXAMINE YOURSELF

We are encouraged to “*examine*” ourselves, I Corinthians 11:28. The idea is to test our thoughts and weigh our actions. Are we really sincere? II Corinthians 13:8. If we are, we will take the bread and wine with reverence and respect.

Paul was careful in issuing this command. He did not say to examine others. We are to search our own heart, look at our own attitude, and check our own conduct.

The apostle was urging us to do a SELF EXAMINATION. He was encouraging me to inspect me (rather than assess you).

My eyes are to be focused inward. I am the subject of my investigation. Others will give an account of themselves. I am only responsible for me. Each of us will answer for himself. Everyone should mind his own business! All of us should appraise ourselves!

We cannot accurately judge others anyway. We barely know ourselves. Therefore, we should search our own minds, examine our own thoughts, and weigh our own behavior.

Self-inspection is difficult but necessary. To mindlessly partake of the Communion will lead to “*eating and drinking judgment on ourselves*,” I Corinthians 11:29.

Does anyone want to bring condemnation on himself? I do not! And I assume you do not either. Hence, each of us must make the Lord’s Supper a time of personal worship.

Let each of us examine ourselves.

RECOGNIZING THE BODY AND BLOOD

When we “*recognize*” the body and blood of Christ, we differentiate them from everything else. The word “*recognize*” can also be translated “*distinguish*,” Acts 15:9.

Paul was urging the Corinthians to concentrate on Jesus. The congregation in Corinth was to differentiate the Communion from every other meal. It was to be treated as a sacred celebration.

Taking the Supper without “*discerning*” may mean two things.

1. It May Indicate Profane Worship. The emblems were merely seen as bread and juice. There was no awareness that God was present. The death of Christ was not in view. There was no appreciation for His sacrifice, no agony over His pain, no distinguishing His death from any other death.

2. It May Suggest Careless Faith. The Corinthian church seemingly accepted the *status quo*. Though the congregation was torn apart by hateful division and loveless contempt, the worshippers continued to eat the Supper. They went through the motions. They ignored the sin in their midst.

God was disappointed. He does not tolerate such thoughtlessness. Profane worship and careless faith leads to unworthy behavior. It makes a mockery of the sacred meal. It disregards the implications of sinful conduct. It allows the Supper to be a meaningless celebration, a routine ritual.

Let us recognize the body and blood of the Lord.

WEAK, SICK, AND ASLEEP

Careless observance of the Communion has disastrous consequences. Abuse of the Supper is directly connected to serious spiritual illness. Like the Corinthians, we can become “*weak, sick, and asleep*,” I Corinthians 11:30.

Certainly the improper partaking of the Supper brings judgment, I Corinthians 11:29. Likely, that judgment includes—though may not be limited to—our spiritual decline.

If we disregard the meaning of the emblems, we will soon ignore other elements of the faith. One mistake will issue into additional mistakes. Eventually, piece-by-piece, the whole structure of our spiritual life will collapse. If present realities are set aside, future hopes will dissolve. Our entire confession will become an empty pretense.

Soon we may wonder: “*What happened?*” The Christian life disintegrates little by little. Faith becomes hollow. Worship loses its meaning. The soul starves.

The table must not be a mockery. If we examine ourselves, if we recognize the distinctive nature of the sacred supper, our faith will not deteriorate. The way to avoid the weakness, illness, and death of our faith is the feed our spirit regularly.

The Communion helps us keep the embers of our faith alive. And, if we consistently remember the Lord each week, we will remain healthy. It is a simple command with a significant purpose.

Let us renew our enthusiasm for the Supper.

JUDGE YOURSELF

Before eating the Supper, we should evaluate our participation, I Corinthians 11:31. Have we been negligent? Thankfully, if we have, He will forgive our shortcomings, I John 1:9.

But, unfortunately, we tend to do what we have done. It is easier to repeat familiar actions. Thus, in the Communion, we may eat and drink judgment on ourselves, I Corinthians 11:29. Surely, a careful assessment of our conduct is worth the effort.

Because we observe the Supper regularly, we can become careless. We may take the emblems as a matter of custom. The Eucharist becomes a mere tradition—something done because it was done before. We go through the motions. We punch our ticket, put a check mark on our Sunday to-do-list.

So what is all the fuss about? We arrange the order of worship. We prepare the elements. We appoint someone to preside at the table. We take the bread and drink the juice. Yet do we remember the Lord? Are we conscious that He is present? Do we invite Him into our life?

Instead of focusing on His death, our mind entertains mundane activities: such as work or play, lunch or a nap. We fail to meet Jesus, to connect with the Lord. The earthly replaces the heavenly. The door is open but we fail to enter.

Is our Communion merely a ritual? Is it a quiet rehearsal of our Sunday afternoon activities? Is it a thoughtless reputation or a disciplined worship?

Let us judge our behavior before God does.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Paul had written much about taking the Communion correctly. More could have been said. But, only when he visited, would he deliver “*further directions*,” I Corinthians 11:34c, (which He planned to do “*very soon*,” I Corinthians 4:19).

What did he have in mind? Why did he hesitate to complete his instructions? We do not know. But, whatever needed further clarification could wait. We are thankful for what he did say. His charge to the Corinthians was already the longest narrative on the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament.

. He Supported A Regular Observance. Though the church had abused the meal, Paul never suggested adjusting it to fit the weakness of men. Faulty observance does not come from the frequency of the practice but the lack of mental discipline.

. He Championed A Careful Participation. Paul had finished his comments. At that time, there was no more to say. He had completed clarifying the meaning of the Supper. It was the responsibility of the Corinthians to apply his teachings.

The same is true of us. We know what should be done. It is a matter of doing it. God wants us to take time to be holy. We should examine ourselves, concentrate on His sacrifice, and proclaim His resurrection until He comes again.

If we do so, our life will be blessed. The Almighty will be honored. We will gain the strength to carry on until we are privileged to feast with Jesus in person.

Let us participate like He is present—because He is.

REMINDERS

The Jews repeatedly made sin offerings. Those sacrifices did not permanently remove their guilt, Hebrews 10:1,2. Instead, as it turned out, the visits to the temple became a “*reminder of their sins*,” Hebrews 10:3.

These reminders made them dissatisfied. They sought a better way. Like us, they desired to be free from sin.

The animal offerings created a longing for a new day, for a better arrangement. The Old Covenant was good. The new Covenant is better, cf. Hebrews 7:22.

. They Were Reminded Of Their Past Sin. The sins of Israel were merely pushed forward. Our transgressions are removed, blotted out, or carried away. “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sin from us.*” We know we have sinned but we are no longer condemned.

. We Are Reminded Of Our Present Redemption. The charges against us have been dropped. “*Though our sins were like scarlet, they have been made as white as snow; though they were as red as crimson, they have become like wool.*” Our record has been expunged. Our regrets have become shouts of joy.

Reminders are good if they recall good things. The Communion remembers the wonder of our salvation. His body was given once for all time. His blood was shed once for every one. No do overs. Nothing left undone. Our penalty has been fully paid. The Supper is a time to look back and look forward.

Let us bow and remember.

HERE AM I

When Christ came into the world, He said, *"Here am I. I have come to do Your will,"* Hebrews 10:9. The Lord offered Himself in voluntary obedience. He submitted to the plan of heaven in order to rescue the people on earth.

That sentiment should be our signature. We come to this part of our Sunday worship to do the will of God. Our participation in His supper is not our will but His will be done.

Jesus came on a mission. And with complete purpose of mind, He fulfilled that mission. *"I came down from heaven,"* He said, *"not to do My will but the will of Him who sent Me,"* John 6:38.

"Not My will, but Your will" requires submission. It calls for surrender. It diminishes self in order to increase the Lord.

Christ was one with the Father. What God wanted, Jesus did. Their intentions were Xerox copies. No variations! No changes! Nothing was added. Nothing was skipped! Those who saw Him saw God. They were two peas in the same pod.

All believers are invited to His Supper. He is at the head of the table. He is the Master of Ceremonies. *"This bread is My body. This juice is My blood,"* He said. *"Remember Me."*

His instructions are clear. Our obedience takes conscious effort. Christ yielded to God. We should, too. Nothing stands in my way but me. Nothing keeps me from honoring Him but myself. It is our turn to follow Him.

Let us surrender to His expectations.

MADE HOLY

By the cross of Christ, we are “*made holy*,” Hebrews 10:10. “*Holy*” means to be pure—to be set apart, to be the chosen people of God. We are counted among the redeemed.

When Jesus came into the world, He died to wash away all sin. He replaced the imperfect sacrifices with a perfect one.

. Christ Removed The Imperfect Sacrifices. The earlier offerings simply rolled sin forward. The later sacrifice took sin away. In other words, God did “*not desire*” animal offerings, Hebrews 10:6. Yet, had He not commanded them? Yes! But the law led mankind to Christ. And, “*now that faith has come, we are no longer under the law*,” Galatians 3:24,25.

. Christ Made The Perfect Sacrifice. The sinless One laid down His life for us. He fulfilled the law. He gave His life as “*a ransom for many*,” Matthew 20:28. His sacrifice was perfect because He was perfect. His death was the noblest act ever done for the Almighty. It was holy and makes us holy. He died so that we could live.

There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. He has already done it for us. All we can do is show our gratitude.

The unleavened bread represents His body. The fruit of the vine symbolizes His blood. These simple items portray a grand truth. Our holiness is His gift. Our eternal redemption was purchased by His flawless sacrifice.

Let us give thanks for our holiness.

ONE SACRIFICE

The priests in the Old Testament did not sit down. Indeed, no chairs were in the tabernacle or temple. The sacrifices under the law had to be repeated time after time. But, when Jesus had finished His sacrifice, He “*sat down*,” Hebrews 10:11,12.

The sacrifice of Christ was given “*once for all*,” Hebrews 10:10. His death at Calvary was sufficient. When the Lord paid the price for sin, He “*sat down at the right hand of God*.”

He did not cease to be our Great High Priest, Hebrews 4:14. He merely ceased making sacrifices. He continues to intercede on our behalf, Hebrews 7:25. He still provides help for our daily needs, Hebrews 2:18; 4:16.

The sacrificial work of Christ is finished. His suffering is over, Hebrews 1:3. Yet He is still busy. We can call on Him any time. He will hear and He will respond.

In the meantime, by His one sacrifice, we have been made whole forever. And, in the interim, we are “*being made holy*,” Hebrews 10:14.

Thank God! Our sins are covered. They are remembered “*no more*,” Hebrews 10:17. And, where there is forgiveness, “*there is no longer any sacrifice for sin*,” Hebrews 10:18.

The Communion calls to mind that sacrifice. It is the only one worth remembering. Though it happened two thousands years ago, its effect is still with us today.

Let us remember His sacrifice.

MADE PERFECT

Christ died one time for everybody. By means of that single sacrifice, He has “*made perfect forever those that are being sanctified,*” Hebrews 10:14. The Lord accomplished what the Old Testament system could not do.

The word in Greek for “*perfect*” refers to a variety of meanings: “*to achieve,*” “*to fulfill,*” “*to complete,*” or “*to finish,*” Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 7:19,28; 11:40; 12:23. God set the goal. That goal was our complete justification. By His sacrifice at Golgotha, that was accomplished. We were made perfectly whole. We have no need to make further sacrifices.

Under the old covenant, sin offerings were constantly repeated. But, under the new covenant, there is only one sacrifice offered one time. No more sacrifices are needed.

Therefore, in this sense, the Bible calls the Christian “perfect.” We still sin. But all of our past misdeeds have been forgiven, erased from our record, and washed away forever! We have full access to salvation. Jesus opened the door to heaven. That door will remain open—unless we shut it.

The Supper of the Lord recalls our redemption. Each week we remember the complete forgiveness of our sins. He paid the price. Our rescue is complete—unless we throw it away.

We do not eat the bread and drink the cup to be forgiven. We partake to proclaim that our forgiveness is already provided. We do not work for it. We celebrate its accomplishment.

Let us rejoice in the perfect sacrifice.

WHEN WE MEET

Our hymnbook contains many gentle reminders. “*When We Meet In Sweet Communion*” is one of them. The words tug at our hearts. They turn our minds to Calvary.

Our souls are brought into closer union when we take the feast divine. We gather together to remember His love beyond all loves combined.

He cared in matchless measure. Our wonder moves in ceaseless praise. We were sinners but He took our place, paid our ransom. He gave His life so that we could live.

It is the feast divine that reminds me of that cost. It tells me I owe Him my life. He bought me. I honor Him. He gave everything. I should not hold back anything. He was the best of heaven. I should give my best to heaven.

The Communion is precious. It tells me of His wondrous care. I stand amazed. My thanks are not enough. I walk in His way because He asks me to. I rejoice in Him. He deserves every word. His death determined my decision.

The Supper is a joy to take. It is a celebration like no other. When I eat the bread and drink the juice He whispers: “*Do this in My memory.*”

At the table “love and faithfulness meet together,” Psalm 85:10. There is no meeting like it, no moment sweeter in life.

Let us pause and reflect.

HE WILL COME AGAIN

It was a few hours before He died. While evil minds huddled to plan His fate, He met with His closest friends in the upper room.

He took the bread and gave thanks. *“Do this in memory of Me.”* And, in hushed tones, He explained why. He did the same with the cup. *“Drink,”* He said. Then He promised to come back and to take us to live with Him, John 14:3.

What He did we do each week. It tells us of His wonderful love. The disciples were with Him. They heard Him. And, by faith, we do, too.

He ate and drank. He prayed and talked. The whole scene was filled with wonder and surprise. The conversation focused on His sacrifice and our salvation.

Eternal redemption cannot be earned. He purchased it for us. The more we hear the more wonderful it sounds.

Ever since that night, Christians have studied His words and followed His directions. We wait in wonder for Him to return.

We understand why He died. We are sorry it was necessary. But we thank Him nonetheless. His death gives us hope until we meet Him face to face.

Soon we will be together forever. I can hardly wait. What a happy time. *“Lord, come quickly!”* I Corinthians 16:22.

Let us pray about His return.

ANOTHER SUNDAY

Another week has gone. Another Sunday has come. The “*Lord’s Day*” is here, Revelation 1:10. His Supper is ready. It is time to eat. We come together to worship our Savior. It is a sacred moment, a retreat from the business of everyday life. We gather to celebrate the feast divine.

Jesus is near. He desires to commune with His people. The King is nigh. The Lord is present. We are on holy ground. He offers the bread. He gives the cup. He says, “*Do this in My memory.*”

We take and eat. We receive and drink. We fellowship with the Most High! It is a privilege to be here, a blessing to participate.

This is a feast like no other. It is not about flavor. It is not about texture. It is not about calories. It is about spiritual nourishment. It is about gaining strength for the coming week.

The Supper is more than manna. It is more than angel’s food. It is given by heaven to sustain our soul. It feeds our spirit for another seven days.

Sunday after Sunday, we eat and drink to maintain the vitality of our Christian walk. Our stomach is not filled but our soul overflows. We renew the reason for life. We recall the purpose for living. We prepare to travel another week—to get closer to heaven, to our mansion in the sky!

Let us be strengthened by our worship around the table.

BREAD OF LIFE

It was late in the evening on the betrayal night. Jesus knew His time had come. If something needed saying, this was the time it should be said.

So, almost with His dying breath, He ordained this solemn feast. The bread of mercy was broken. The wine of love was given. He spoke of His sacrifice. He asked that we remember: "In His death, we have life."

We have met to keep this Supper. We gather around the table to think of Him. The bread reminds us of His body. The fruit of the vine suggests His blood. They help us to repeat these words: "He died in our stead."

We see His heart broken by sorrow. We recall His sweat drops of blood. We behold His tears of agony on the tree. Our Lord died for you and me. It is this feast that reminds us of His love. It is a token of His care (when no one cared for Him). And by His grace our souls are fed.

We need this reminder. He knew we did. It is so easy to forget amidst the push and shove of life. It is important that we take time to be holy.

Allow this moment to nourish your faith. We need His strength for our weary soul. Earth takes. Heaven gives. This is the hour to receive, welcome, and embrace His refreshing love. The deeper we mediate, the more we gain.

Let us remember the Bread of Life.

THE QUESTION

Why did He come to earth? Why did He experience a virgin birth? Because He loved us so!

Why did He endure the ridicule? Why did He bear the mockery? Why did He allow that cruel beating? Because He loved me so!

Why did He drink the bitter cup? Why did He suffer pain and woe? Why did He die on a cross? Because He loved you so!

It was no fun. He could have remained in heaven. Most of the world does not care. We are overwhelmed that He cared so much!

Jesus showed us what it means to do for others who do not deserve it. He defined grace. He exemplified endurance. He modeled forgiveness. He is a living testimony to what heaven will be like.

He deserves our praise. He earned it. Till He returns, we should give witness to His matchless name. Why? Because He loved us so! He gave His life because we needed redemption. He died so that we could live.

We eat the bread. We drink the wine. Our questions are answered. There is no need to ask. We know. We move ahead. The answer is in hand. We know why He came. And we know why He is coming again.

Let us partake because He loved us so.

IN THE DARKNESS

One of the high points of His ministry came at the low point of His life. He knew that Calvary was ahead. He knew He was about to be betrayed. He knew but He was determined to finish His mission.

So He took the bread. And, despite what Judas was doing, He gave thanks. Then, He broke the symbol of His flesh. And, to His followers He spoke, "Take eat, this is my body."

His gift was for all who believe. "Take eat," He said. "Take eat and live." We renew that simple feast. It brings His wondrous love to mind again.

Then, with gentle hands, He took the cup. He spoke with gratitude to the One who sent Him. His voice was kind. His words were few. "Drink this in remembrance of Me."

His life He gave to wash our soul. He was pure. We were not. His death made the difference. He saved the lost. He died for you and me.

In the darkness, there was light. In the night, hope shined bright. The sun appeared after the storm. Good overcame evil. Sin had its moment. But grace won the game!

This world is dark. Evil seems to reign. But, when all was said done, He is on His throne. And, until we join Him, we eat and drink to His victory.

Let us give thanks.

IT IS WORTH REPEATING

On that dreadful night before He died, the Lamb of God surrendered His life. *"Not My will but Yours be done,"* He prayed.

The bread of life was broken. The wine of redemption was shed. Hope was offered. The price was paid.

We have come to eat this simple Supper. We have gathered to remember Him. With all of the saved ones, we solemnly repeat: "He did this for you and me."

We look on His shattered body. We gaze at His tears. And, by this feast, our minds recall that sacrifice that freed us all.

Within each of us is stirred thoughts that defy description (and emotions that stagger the mind). We are left speechless. Words cannot tell. Voice cannot utter. All we can do is pray!

Why did He do it? Why did He suffer? *"Greater love has no one than that he lay down His life for His friends,"* John 15:13.

Indeed, it is worth repeating. *"Very rarely will anybody die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us,"* Romans 5:7,8.

Yes, that is worth repeating. It happened once. It is remembered forever. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Let us remember what is worth repeating.

UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN

We are redeemed by Christ. We keep His memory alive. We do this each week “until He comes again.”

He gave Himself. His body is seen in this memorial bread. Our feeble love is in this way fed “until He comes again.”

His awful agony is clear. His cries of pain we hear. It is fixed in our minds “until He comes again.”

On that dark betrayal night, He died for every slight. But, by these emblems, we unite “until He comes again.”

The Eucharist looks back to the upper room. It looks forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And the Lord said that He would eat it anew “when He comes again.”

He looks forward to our salvation. We rejoice in His love. Blessed are those who eat His supper “until He comes again.”

The emblems do not represent abstract ideas. They do not suggest vague theories of redemption. They point to Jesus—His body and His blood. We take the bread and drink the wine to remember. We become one with Him. He invites us in. We do this “until He comes again.”

The Supper looks in every direction—in and out, up and down, back and forth. We get a glance of time and eternity, of now and later. We think of Him back then and look forward to seeing Him “when He comes again.”

Let us keep Him in mind until He returns.

IN HIS MEMORY

We eat this bread and drink this cup in memory of His love.
We keep the sacred feast to honor Him who is above.

This is the time when every believing heart is a welcome guest.
In unity we eat and in honor we partake, until we reach our
final rest.

By faith we take the bread, for He died in our stead. With it our
souls are fed, till we rise from the dead. The cup we also drink
in reverent awe of Him who did it all.

Beneath His throne, we bow in thanks. We express our love
until we see Him above. We anticipate by faith what we will
see by sight!

The Communion is a stepping stone, a launching pad. We eat
and drink to prepare for a better place. What we do today is a
rehearsal for tomorrow. It is the foundation of what is to come.

We eat this Supper in His memory. We are humbled by His
care. What He did is an example of what we should do. We
need a cross-shaped heart.

It requires concentration to partake in His memory. He asked
us to focus our thoughts, to visualize the cross, to consider His
sacrifice. We cannot be like him unless we think like Him. We
cannot bear our cross unless we walk in His way.

Let us partake in His memory.

AT THE TABLE

We gather now in sacred silence to eat the Supper. Here at the table we remember the death of Jesus. We feel the power of His presence, the warmth of His fellowship. We call our thoughts away from self and sin in order to partake with Him.

Eat with us, Lord. Take the bread and bless the cup as we sit with You and sup. It is here we find pardon and peace. It is here from stress and strain we get full release. It is here at the table we breathe a sigh of relief.

At the table our faith is renewed. Our hope is rekindled. And our strength is refreshed. At the table we catch our second breath. We see a new vision. At the table we forget the past and press on toward the future.

Come, Lord, come to the table. We wish to dine with You. Our invitation is genuine. Our hearts are pure. We focus on Calvary. Bring Your light so we can see Your wounds. We need a glimpse of yesterday to prepare us for tomorrow.

The best place to be is at His table. Here we meet our Savior. Here we eat the Supper of the Lord. We are always welcome. We enjoy His company. We wish we could stay forever. But forever is another time and place.

Now is the moment of reality. Now is the experience of a lifetime. At the table we gather once again. May the joy of the moment carry us to new heights of spiritual health and new avenues of faithful service.

Let us gather at the table.

IN HIS PRESENCE

In His presence, we humbly bow. Come, Lord, meet us now.
Let us eat together in sweet Communion. Your presence is a
wonderful choice. Life can be tedious but in Your company we
rejoice.

At this time, let us celebrate the fellowship we have together.
Some wish to be in the presence of the rich and famous. I
prefer to dine with the carpenter for Nazareth.

For, in this sacred meeting, we find our souls refreshed. The
bread is small. The juice is barely a taste. But the memory is
worth it all.

At this simple meal we meet with Him. We can share whatever
is on our heart. He will listen. He will sympathize. He will
help.

Yes, He is present. And He wants us to be present, too. He
wishes for us to come close and worship Him. Let us engage
our minds and control our thoughts. Let us concentrate on
Him. The Supper requires our full attention.

He is present. I have no reason to be anywhere else. Worries
can wait. Concerns can be delayed. Let Christ be honored.
Give Him our mind. He deserves our time.

He gave His all. He asks us to do the same. He is here. He
wants us to come to the table, to be present while we
commune.

Let us focus on Him.

HIS GUEST

Come Lord! We want to be with You. Indeed, we wish to be Your guest. The table is spread. The emblems are ready. The meal is Yours. You called us together. Come, Lord, You are the host.

We meet as You met in the upper room. You invite us to remember. "Take eat," You say, "This bread represents My body." And, by faith, we receive the cup. The purpose is the same. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

We are one body. We partake at one table. One church united in the Communion with her One Lord. One name we bear. One bread we break. With all the saints, we eat and drink in humble adoration.

We are Your guests. In love, we come. In joy, we stay. We eat with You to remember the gift You gave. Open our eyes, that we may see the wonder of Your death.

It is great to be Your guest. An honor we do not deserve. Yet You ask us to come without reserve. We celebrate Your unbelievable kindness. We wish to be kind in return.

How do we say "thanks" when thanks is not enough? All You ask is for us to be present, to mind our manners, and think of the price You paid. We must do that because we are Your guests.

Let each of us show our appreciation.

NEW STRENGTH RECEIVE

In this life, the Communion is our highest honor. No dinner is its equal. No banquet comes close. No greater gift can be given. He invited us to His Supper—our strength to renew.

He asked that we fix our thoughts on things above, our hearts on Him in love. We come to the meal to enjoy His company.

We approach Him in humble thanks. He comes each week to renew our faith in Him. What joy to be in His presence!

The loaf is broken. The bread of life is shared. He gives His blessing as we eat. Jesus nourishes our spirit for another week.

Great memories come to mind as we drink the cup. His blood! His truth! His kindness! And His rescue!

These scenes of gracious love fill our souls. They win our admiration. They melt our hearts. He did so much for us.

So we come. We gather to be recharged. We expect to receive new strength from above. This is the hour—all gain, no lose.

He knows we need His help. We do, too. We come to be with Him, to refill our sagging spirit. It is time to receive the nurture He can give. It is time to drink water from the fountain of life.

I am glad He invited me to eat with Him this day. I open my mind. I allow Him to enter me. And, when I do, stronger I will be.

Let us make room for Christ.

HE IS HERE

Around this table we meet the Lord. Here we think holy thoughts, remember the greatest event in history. He died for us. Here we lay aside our earthly load and think of Calvary. Here we repose in peace and joy, love and gratitude.

Here I feast upon the bread and drink the juice. Here I grasp with firmer hand my eternal hope. Around this table, I catch a glimpse of my heavenly home. It is a quick reminder of where I long to be.

Feast after feast I partake with happy expectations. They are a rehearsal of what is soon to come. Here I have a grand foretaste of my happy place with those who have passed away.

Every week I look forward to this time. It gives me reassurance. It nourishes my spirit. I would not be whole if I skipped the Supper—a loss that wounds my soul.

Week after week I wait to meet Him who hosts this meal. It is a time of gracious fellowship, an opportunity that I cannot neglect. It is more important than my daily bread. Communion with the Lord puts my mind on higher ground.

It is the Supper of the Lamb—filled with goodness for all who come. Prepare your heart! Focus your thoughts! Be ready to meet Him here!

He waits for you and me. Feast after feast He wants to be with us. He welcomes His saints with open arms at His sacred table.

Let us come to the feast.

TILL HE COMES

“Until He comes!” Let those words linger. “Until He comes!” What a joy that will be! I hold my breath. My heart is filled with wonder. I cannot imagine. In a little while, I will see Him. In other words, heaven is just beyond the horizon.

Then the weary traveler can lay down his load. The journey will be over. Eternity will begin. What a reunion in the sweet by and by. We will exchange our burdens for endless bliss—when He comes again!

I do not know when it will be. But, likely, He will come sooner than expected. We must be ready for His return. For, when He appears, time will cease. There will be no second chance! No delay! No tomorrow!

The feast of love is prepared. It is a reminder of His final coming. Eat the bread. Drink the cup. He is on His way. He will be here any day. He is headed to earth. We must not wait. He is coming only once. And, when He does, it is over.

What will I be doing? I will do it no more—when He comes again. This life will be done. There is no time to waste because He is coming again.

“Till He comes” means He has not yet arrived. But, when He arrives, we will meet Him in the skies. Are we ready for that reunion?

Let us pray that we may be faithful “till He comes again.”

ALL ELSE SURPASSING

Night cannot hide His gift. No one can take it away. But I can lose it if I fail to embrace that love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

How can I hide my shame when the Supper is served? The Lord is near, the emblems are blessed, and I see His love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

My best is not enough to repay the debt I owe. I give myself—imperfect as I am—to express my thanks for His love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

I eat the bread. It reminds me of His body broken. I drink the cup to remember His shed blood. I receive His love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

Why did He do it? It is beyond human words to say. He came. He lived. He died. All because He had a love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

How can I refuse? How can I neglect? What He did is so compelling. Indeed, it is a love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

I commune in gratitude. Gripped by grace, overwhelmed by mercy, and stunned by His love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

He has a mansion for me. A place prepared in eternity. I cannot wait to taste that love ALL ELSE SURPASSING.

Let us rejoice in His love beyond compare.

WHAT A THOUGHT

Crushed by God. WHAT A THOUGHT! He died for me, a wretched sinner—without one plea. He gave His life because He cared for me.

He bore my shame, carried my sorrow. WHAT A THOUGHT! In my stead, He was condemned. He bled and died so that I could live.

Blind, confused, and lost! I did not have a prayer. WHAT A THOUGHT! But He was full of love just for me.

Lifted high for those who stooped so low. WHAT A THOUGHT! He showed me grace when I showed Him none.

He will return to take me home. WHAT A THOUGHT! I want to be in that number. I want to live with Him for eternity.

But, in His company, I cannot be if I refuse to walk with Him. WHAT A THOUGHT! I can stop God from saving me.

Many will ignore Him now. WHAT A THOUGHT! They will take communion but not remember what He did. His body and blood will be wasted.

Please, Lord, I do not want to ignore You. Take my mind so I can be in Your presence. WHAT A THOUGHT!

This is the first day of the week. I can mess up if I fail to think it through. It is His day. I am on holy ground.

Let us give Him our full attention.

HE LOVED ME SO

A question grips my mind. Why did He leave heaven? Why did He come to earth? Why think of us when we did not think of Him?

The answer blows my mind. It makes no sense to me. He had it all but left it for you and me. He was not content to let us be.

He knew that most of us would not care. We would walk away when He asked us to stay. It hurts to think how thoughtless we can be.

Still the Lord came. He had no regret though we refused His company. He loved us still when we turned our back on Him.

Who does that? Who cares that much? Who remains warm when others are so cold?

He did. He cared. He stayed the course. He loved when others gave Him hate. He is an example I find difficult to emulate.

Thus, He asks us each week to remember. He wants us to think hard so that we can live soft, see Him so we can be like Him.

He gave His body and His blood. We should do the same. The world needs His sacrifice and our love.

We take these emblems to remember. And, in His memory, we do what He did. That is the way we live in love!

Let us worship so we can get to work.

HE GAVE

He laid down His life for us. His precious blood He shed. He did that once on Calvary. And, since He did, we gather in His memory.

HE GAVE so that we could give. He left heaven above to walk here below. He wants us to be with Him. Why should we walk alone?

He suffered much for you and me. Far more than there is time to see. In His bitter agony, He rescued us for eternity.

HE GAVE so that we could give. He bought for us what we could not earn. He gave what we often spurn. Salvation free—pardon and forgiveness—for you and me.

HE GAVE so others could live. His gift gives us endless hope. His kindness is beyond belief. We struggle to understand His saving grief.

HE GAVE so that we could be like Him. He planted the seed. He wishes it would grow. There is so much to learn, so much to know. I pray He will be patient with me.

HE GAVE so we would lead others to Him. His body and His blood are reminders of His treasured gift. We unwrap that gift in order to pass it on.

HE GAVE SO THAT WE COULD GIVE.

Let us remember: “freely we have received, freely we should give.”

AWESOME!

I am lost in the wonder of His life so rare. How could He love me—a sinner who did not care?

IT IS AWESOME! A truth to behold! For me He bled and died. He shed no tears for Himself.

IT IS AWESOME! A dream come true! I did nothing. He did it all. He came. He suffered. He died. Simply because He wanted to!

IT IS AWESOME! A gift I do not deserve! God sent Him to save me. He knew His destiny but He came to make it so.

IT IS AWESOME! A deed beyond compare! The angels beckon me to look and see. They sing of Him in blissful revelry.

IT WILL BE AWESOME! A song for everyone! He took my sin and sorrow. He paid the price. He made me His own. He suffered to bring me home.

IT WILL BE AWESOME! Up in glory, I will get to see. And a new song I shall always sing: “He did it for you and me.”

AWESOME! Clearly beyond my greatest hope. It is amazing! Wonderful! Spectacular! More than I can every wish.

I remember. I look up. I eat the bread and drink the cup. It is the least that I can do.

Let us bow in reverent respect.

AND THEY SLEPT

By faith, I see the winding path that leads to Gethsemane. A prayerful place where each can catch a glimpse of Him on bended knee!

“Stay here,” He told the three. Stay here and “watch for Me.” But they did not grasp what He was doing in Gethsemane.

Sweat drops of blood graced His brow. He knew His fate but stayed anyhow. The three took their leave. They closed their eyes—their weariness to relief.

The night was calm. Their eyelids were heavy. They did not do what He asked. Now it is our turn! Will we keep this feast in His memory?

Why did they rest? Why did they nap? Why did they surrender to sleep? The flesh set the mode. They did not care enough for Him who carried their load!

In anguish, He accepted the cross. It was our gain at His expense. Yet He did it gladly with no pretense. It was not deserved but He paid the price for those who slept.

For sin He did not do, He shed His blood. He gave His life! Such grace we will not see if we sleep through our Gethsemane.

We are here to watch and pray. This is our moment to show our care for Him. Will we stay awake? Will we honor Him who asked us to remember?

Let us “keep watch” as we eat the Supper of the Lord.

THE CROSS

It is time to kneel at the CROSS. For, there we find a precious fountain. A healing stream for you and me! It flows from Calvary's mountain.

In that CROSS, I find a mercy tree. It has a beacon of refuge—a welcome sight.

Near that CROSS I find relief. An awesome place that feeds my soul! I look in hope, it dispels my grief.

By the CROSS, I am forgiven. He paid what I could never pay. My load is lifted. My sin is gone. What more can I say?

Words do not tell the story of the CROSS. But I know enough to plea: "Please Lord, let me see those scars of Calvary."

When I see, I shall not hesitate. Without doubt, I will shout, "My Lord, my God!" The CROSS does that for me.

The CROSS is in the Communion—a lovely place to be. The gracious thoughts and happy feelings are there just for you and me.

At the CROSS! Near the CROSS! By the CROSS! What a blessed space. I refuse to abuse that glorious place.

Let us ponder the old rugged cross.

CALVARY

The name is so familiar. The meaning is etched in my mind.
But, lest I forget, take me again to CALVARY!

I need to remember His agony. It was there He gave His life for
me. His sacrifice—my salvation—on CALVARY!

He was given a tomb—a solemn room. Mary kept a vigil there.
And so should I. A place to think and meditate—at CALVARY!

The soldiers stood watch—a futile exercise. Jesus would not
remain. Yet there He was. Man did their worst. God did His
best—on a hill called CALVARY!

Let me be like Mary. She came with a gift (though that stone
she could not lift). The Lord would intervene at that scene we
refer to as CALVARY!

May I come each week to this place. The bread I eat. The cup I
drink. It is my worship space called CALVARY!

I am sorry He suffered such woe. But I am glad He loved me so.
I shed happy tears for what He did at CALVARY!

I am tossed back and forth by the memories. It had to be—He
died for me. A sad thought, a joyful truth—the place I know as
CALVARY!

Lest I forget, lead me back to that space. It is happy place, my
saving grace. CALVARY!

Let us remember lest we forget.

FOR ME

Out of the halls of heaven, into a hateful world below, He came knowing He was headed to realms of misery and woe.

Why did He do it? Why did He love me so? It is His nature to help the hurting, bind up broken hearted, and heal the ill of mind.

A bent reed He would not break. A useless wick He would not forsake. He took me as I was, to make me what I should be.

I bow in awe. I stand in respect because He paid it all. It was for me He came. And it is for me He will come again.

I wait in hope to see Him. His return I celebrate. He came once as my Lamb. He will come again as my King.

I eat this bread in memory of His broken body. I drink this wine to recall His shed blood. Each was given for me.

This is the Communion of the Lord. It is my connection with Him above. I worship the One who embraced me in unspeakable love.

I set aside all earthy thoughts. I give Him my complete attention. As my God, He deserves this token of my affection.

This table is where I greet Him. This table is where I meet my Savior. And, by His side, there is a place reserved just for me.

Let us treat Him as His grateful servant.

HE AROSE

In vain they watched His grave. In vain they sealed His tomb.
In vain they hoped to keep Him in that burial room.

But He arose to live again!

Death met its match. It lost its grip. He ruled that day. He gave
death the slip.

He arose in victory!

He came to life. We appeared in clear view. Many saw Him.
They were convinced. It was He who was alive.

He arose never to die again!

The dawn greeted Him. It was a welcome sight. Death lost its
sting. And a new song we now sing.

He arose and we will, too!

The angels invited them to look and see. His grave clothes
were there as empty as could be.

He arose to meet us at this table!

We should greet Him here. He comes each week to allay all
fear.

And, I am sure, we will rise to meet Him in the skies!

Let us celebrate that victory.

I AM HIS

My faith looks up to see the Lamb of Calvary. He hears me while I pray. He takes all my guilt away.

I AM HIS!

May Your grace impart strength to my weary heart. And, if I stray, may You remain my hope and stay.

I AM HIS!

When death ends this life below, I will tread the golden streets above. His grace makes it so.

I AM HIS!

I declare that He is mine. I eat the bread and drink the wine. With the Lord, I gladly dine.

I AM HIS!

I do this every week. A solemn charge I keep. I approach the table—His memory to seek.

I AM HIS!

May He linger in my thoughts all week long. May He be my light, my constant song.

Let us worship like we are His.

ALONE

In Gethsemane, He prayed alone. During His trial no one defended Him. His disciples scattered. His Father stepped back. And, on the cross, He felt alone.

It did not have to be. But it was. No one came to comfort Him (though He had comforted them). His broken heart uttered that painful plea: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

He came to His own but they received Him not. He healed the sick yet no thanks He got. The world did its worst to Him who did His best for them. Why was He left alone?

Why such cruelty? Why such hurt? In pain He suffered the insults of a careless mob. They had no kindness to give Him who had been so kind to them. He was alone.

Today He waits for us to eat and drink with Him. His welcome mat is out. Will we refuse His offer? Will we stand indifferent to His call? Will we leave Him at His table by Himself?

He wants to talk with us. He has much to say. But His welcome words will go unheard if we fail to venture near. This is the moment to seek Him who asks us to dine with Him today!

I come! I come! I come to the table ready to worship! Ready to listen! Ready to be His friend! I refuse to leave Him by Himself. Thus I come to take the emblems like a friend should and do.

Let us not leave Him alone.

WE COME TO WORSHIP HIM

Every week we come. Every week we sing and pray. We bring our offering on this special day. WE COME TO WORSHIP HIM.

May we keep in mind all He said. May we remember Him as we take the communion bread. WE COME TO HONOR HIM.

May we thoughtfully drink the cup. In one accord, may we receive His blessing as we sup. WE COME TO EXALT HIM.

It is a privilege to bow to Him. He is our happy song, our sacred hymn. WE COME TO PRAISE HIS NAME.

Why should we mindless be? There is so much to remember, so much to see. WE COME TO CHERISH HIS MEMORY.

It is a sober thought. He left His throne to serve His own—a gesture of His majesty. WE COME TO MAGNIFY OUR KING.

He has invited His family to His table. All His children are eager to be with Him. WE COME TO ENJOY HIS COMPANY.

He came to be a sacrifice for our sin. It is a joy to be included in. WE COME TO REMEMBER HIM.

I see it clear. The Communion is a reminder. He is here. WE COME TO REJOICE IN HIS LOVING CHOICE.

Let us worship Him.

ON CALVARY

He came from above to demonstrate His love. A sight to behold! Worth far more than gold! He did what we could never do in His suffering ON CALVARY.

We bow with humble heart to do our part. We answer His call who did it all. The price was steep. It makes me weep for His suffering ON CALVARY.

We remember His death that gives us life. Healed by His wounds, we recall His strife. His grace flows full and free in His suffering ON CALVARY.

My debt was paid. The purchase of my pardon was made. He died for me in His suffering ON CALVARY.

This bread we take. This juice we drink. They renew our hope. They help us think of His suffering ON CALVARY.

We happily ponder the joy up yonder. We will join the angel choir. With anthems of glory, we will not be sorry to sing of His suffering ON CALVARY.

Oh what wonderful mercy, what needed relief. His grace reaches those who express their belief. We eat in memory of His suffering ON CALVARY.

We pause to meditate. A silent posture we willingly take. The Communion is a sacred time to see His suffering ON CALVARY.

Let us worship the One who suffered on Calvary.

THE SUPPER OF THE LORD

We meet in sweet Communion. We participate in a solemn reunion. THIS IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

The feast divine is spread. Our minds are focused on the bread. THIS IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

We concentrate on His body broken. His sacrifice is a loving token. IT IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

God gave in wondrous measure. He gave the best there was. THIS IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

He bought us with His matchless treasure. I vow to do His pleasure. IT IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

He gave His all. Dare we give nothing in return? THIS IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

This sacred meal we respect. We remember His blood in retrospect. IT IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

While we sup, Christ gently whispers: "Do this in My memory." THIS IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

I humbly eat and drink. It is a time to pause and think. IT IS THE SUPPER OF THE LORD.

Precious feast all else surpassing. Love divine for you and me.

Let us eat His Supper in His memory.

WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

When my faith grows weak. When renewed strength I seek. I
go in memory to the Garden of Gethsemane. WHY DID HE
LOVE ME SO?

When my wish to carry my cross is low, I seek that spot where
He used to go. WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

My mind sees His body broken. His wounds were His dying
token. WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

When my trust burns dim, I turn back to Him. My faith is not a
passing whim. WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

I confess I love Him less. His love knows no recess. Everyday
His death my life does bless. WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

On Calvary I behold His agony. He suffered on that bitter tree.
I return to that place to see. WHY HE LOVED ME SO!

To life I turn once more. My soul on strengthened wings soar.
And I view His death as salvation's door. WHY DID HE LOVE
ME SO?

I cannot rest content. Until in this Supper ample time is spent.
So I ask on knees lowly bent: WHY DID HE LOVE ME SO?

It gives me pause to think of the cause. And to see that love
that lies in His sacrifice. I KNOW WHY HE LOVED ME SO.

Let us recall that love divine.