

## Aladdin

*When my children were small, one of the movies they loved the most was Disney's Aladdin. The movie was a great success. This was due in no small part to the talents of Robin Williams, the comedian, who gave voice to the genie in the film. At one point, the genie is asked why he lives inside a lamp. The reply was simple; "it's a package deal. Vast cosmic powers and itty-bitty living quarters."*

*The genie is just a legend, of course, but the comparison between the genie and Christ is a fruitful one. No greater power could exist than that which belongs to Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe through whom all things were made. Yet he chose to become a human being like the rest of us, confining himself to a human body and to a human fate — death. We might look at it in detail from the night of the Last Supper.*

- *He accepted the betrayal of Judas. He even reached out to him by washing his feet with the other disciples.*
- *He did this at a Passover supper, knowing that he was about to become the ultimate Passover lamb, sacrificed for our sins.*

*It is the greatest example of humility among the great. In doing this, he set an example for us. It is the Christian's duty to imitate Christ, and we see in communion and the Last Supper some very great examples to imitate.*

- *We take communion regularly because Christ implemented this ritual to be done in remembrance of him. At the very least we can be obedient in that.*
- *By washing the disciples' feet he said an example of humility. If the greatest among us can serve the least, what task is beneath a Christian?*
- *By washing Judas' feet he said an example of accepting others. We are not a happy chorus of automatons; we are human beings. We cannot automatically accept everyone into our fellowship without effort. Our Lord opened his arms and his service to one and all. We should do likewise.*

*The process of preparation for communion include self-examination. That self-examination should include an accounting of those who might have unsettled grievances with you. Do not let the day pass without making the effort to reconcile, for Christ's greatest example is that on the Cross he reconciled the human race to God Almighty.*

**January 10**

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## Mercy Seat

Ever since Indiana Jones got involved with it, the Ark of the Covenant has been a familiar item to millions of moviegoers. Just for reference, here is one artist's interpretation of what it looked like.



We may add a little bit of detail to the picture here. The ark contained the tablets on which Moses inscribed the 10 Commandments, the rod of Aaron and a pot of manna — all items which could be used as indictments against the people of Israel. The ark itself was so sacred it was not to be touched by human hands; in at least one instance the person who did touch it died instantly. Most interesting of all is the top cover. This is called the Mercy Seat and is also known as the Atonement Cover. It is the place where God appeared to Moses and later the high priests.

The cover itself had a number of interesting characteristics which point to Christ.

- The cover itself was made from pure gold, symbolizing the eternal nature of God's mercy. The gold itself was contributed as part of a free will offering, not taxation. It's a sign that God's mercy is free and cannot be bought.
- The two angels you see on the cover are cherubim. As cherubim do, they are worshiping God; their wings also overshadow the cover. How often have you been told to shelter in God's wings which will overshadow you?
- When the ark was dedicated, it was dedicated and purified with blood — a forerunner of the crucifixion, purifying us through the blood of Christ.
- How often in the Old Testament does the Scripture say that God is "enthroned between the cherubim." The mercy seat is the Old Testament version of the throne of grace.

As the Ark of the Covenant was a visible sign to the people of Israel, so Communion is a visible sign to the Christian. There are many parallels.

- Communion is offered to us freely by God, for the mercy of God is beyond price.

- *It is offered to us at the price of the atonement, which could only have been paid by the Perfect Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*
- *Like the Ark, it is sacred, for in this ceremony we handle the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior.*

*Therefore, prepare yourself for communion correctly. Examine yourself; ask forgiveness wherein you have sinned and plan your repentance. Then, with the reverence suited for the utterly holy, partake.*

## One-of-a-kind

In the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Leviticus, Moses reviews the Ten Commandments for the people of Israel. To emphasize each of these commandments, he ends his little lessons with the same phrase: "I am the Lord your God." It seems just like a place marker if you read it through quickly. But if you pay some attention to it you will see it is an extremely important phrase.

- "I AM." It is the very name of God, the self-existent one. He is the one being who must exist, for the universe borrows the idea of existence from him. If He doesn't exist, nothing else does either.
- "The Lord." The one who rules over this universe by right of creation. His Lordship over all things is an essential part of his character. He cannot refuse to be Lord.
- "Your God." The giver of all good and gracious gifts, the God especially associated with you. The God who proclaims you to be his child.

These things alone would be quite sufficient as cause for us to worship him. But now consider what he did for us.

- He entered into his own universe in the form of a human being. He became completely man. The ruler of all things became one of us. It would be like you becoming Daffy Duck.
- In his adult life, he walked the earth with a few disciples, being the example of all things righteous and the teacher of all things good. He could have left it to us to find out by experiment — but he is the way, the truth and the life. He left nothing to chance.
- His main purpose in coming was to serve as our atonement. His primary purpose for becoming human is summed up at his death, burial and resurrection — He is the sacrifice which covers our sins.

Communion is a reminder of these things. Considering the cosmic scale of what he has done and the importance of his sacrifice for our eternal life, he has left us with a very simple ritual to be performed to remind us of these things.

- As you partake from the cup, you are tasting his blood. As you eat the bread, you are tasting his body. You do this to remember what he has done for you.
- You also declare by taking this cup that you anticipate his return to earth in glory and power. You also declare that this is the beginning of the great judgment, where in Christ will judge the living and the dead in accordance with what they have done.
- Finally, you proclaim by taking communion that you believe that his kingdom will have no end — it will last forever and ever, hallelujah!

It's a very heavy load of meaning in a very light meal. Treat it with reverence and dignity, making peace with your Lord as you do.

## Transfiguration

*We would do well to begin by reading the Scripture concerning this unusual event.*

*Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.*

*(Luke 9:28-36 NASB)*

*The first thing to strike the eye of the reader is that Jesus did not bring along all twelve apostles. He brought the three that were closest to him. Such a powerful and unusual event we might begin by asking why. The strongest answer I can find is that God reveals himself to the faithful. He does not reveal himself so that you can prove God exists. If you could conjure up God and tell him to heal someone, you would not be dealing with God. The omnipotent one doesn't need direction from you. God deals with those who already believe.*

*There are some other points we might note here.*

- *Moses and Elijah appear. The Jews of this time would equate that phrase with "the Law and the Prophets." In other words, they would see these two representing everything the Old Testament teaches.*
- *Peter's reaction is typical of most human beings. We are having a wonderful time; let's hang onto it as long as we can. Let's camp out here; I'll get the marshmallows.*
- *God, as usual, has the last word. He tells them to listen to Christ, his Son, the Chosen One. If you will, he puts Moses and Elijah in their proper place.*

*Taken together, I suggest to you that the Transfiguration is the completion of the Old Testament. God does not replace his law or his prophets; he completes their work. The end of Christ's ministry is near; it will complete all the law and all the prophets.*

*Communion, in the same way, completes the Passover of the Old Testament. The unblemished lamb is transfigured into the sinless Christ, sacrificed on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins. Just as Passover was timed precisely, to be eaten in haste, so communion represents God's timing for the entrance of the Christ sacrifice. It is no accident that he came during the Roman empire, in a time of peace. This enabled the spread of the gospel to be very rapid. Passover represented the demarcation between the land of sin (Egypt) and the promised land. So too, communion represents the demarcation between our lives of sin and salvation.*

*As you partake this morning, look carefully. Your Lord tells you that you are handling his body and his blood. We take this symbolically, of course — but seriously. Treat these elements with the proper respect. As you partake, meditate on what they mean: your Lord sacrificed himself so that you might have eternal life. This is our way of remembering Him.*

*We will not always have this memorial; the day is coming when Christ shall return to judge the living and the dead.  
Until then, we have this reminder.*

## Humility

We shall examine three things this morning:

- What Christ has done for us.
- How he did it.
- How we should respond to it.

There are three things that Christ has done, or will do, that are of primary importance.

- He is our atonement. He, and he alone, has paid the price for our sins. This by itself puts us greatly in his debt.
- In so doing, he built the bridge between God and man. We have access to the throne of heaven because of the sacrifice of Christ. No longer must prayer be filtered through a priest, a temple and animal sacrifices — the door to heaven is open. He is our way.
- He has promised that his return he will bring a new heaven and a new earth, ending sin and injustice and establishing the visible kingdom of God. He is our hope.

These things are evident to all Christians. It may be instructive this morning for us to look at how he did it. Paul outlines this for us in *Philippians 2:5-11*,

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NASB)*

The first thing we need learn from this is that he took upon himself The form of a human being. There are two things in this I would have you notice:

- First, he emptied himself. He set aside all of the power and glory of being God so that he might become flesh.
- Next, he took on the form of human flesh, being born as a baby to the Virgin Mary. It's not just laying aside his godly attributes, but going through the birth canal like the rest of us.

This was culminated in the style of his death. He suffered the most shameful death of his day — crucifixion. Crucifixion was a spectacle, an entertainment for the crowd, at which they laughed at the man being crucified. Not in the slightest a dignified death, it was intended to be the final humiliation of a criminal's life. That's how he became our atonement.

This should provoke us to thought: how do we respond to such an outpouring of love? In the process of taking communion we should recognize these basic things. May I suggest that we begin by taking Paul's suggestion: "have this attitude in yourselves..."

- 1 *Take it with humility. Don't tell God how grateful he should be for what a wonderful Christian you are; rather partake in the spirit in which you know you are a sinner.*
- 2 *Take it with gratitude. Be genuinely thankful for what he has done, having rescued you from sin and death. Acknowledge his pain and death on your behalf.*
- 3 *Take it with anticipation. Every time you take communion you look forward to the day when he returns, bringing with him judgment and the New Heaven and New Earth.*

*Sometimes communion becomes so routine that we forget its monumental significance. Let us remember the great things he has done and the humble way he did them.*

## Aches

*It's Sunday morning. The alarm is going off and you are staring at the ceiling. Your body checks in with its assorted pains. Your feet are cold. Your knees ache. Your back is not happy about getting up, either. And to top it off, you have a headache — and it's Sunday morning. You have to go to church.*

*You go down to breakfast. The toaster is on the fritz and has presented you with a burnt offering which vaguely resembles a slice of bread. The orange juice reminds you that you have a sore throat. It's the eggs that really do it for you: you forgot your spouse had promised the kids green eggs and ham for breakfast. Thank you, Dr. Seuss.*

*Starting at the breakfast table — and you know it's going to continue in the car all the way to church — is the petty bickering of your children. Just at the moment when you want the world see your children as smiling and happy, they're going to get out of the car as little crabs on the edge of an explosion.*

*As you sit ready to take communion, you wonder: did Jesus ever have to put up with this stuff? Does he know what I go through just to get to communion?*

- *Did he suffer from pain and exhaustion? He once fell asleep in a small boat in the middle of a storm. He knew what it is to be tired.*
- *He knew the problems of the world, also. Remember when the tax collectors harassed him for the two-drachma tax — and he told Peter to go fishing for it?*
- *The ordinary spiritual side of life for him has its problems too. How do you think he felt knowing that Judas was going to betray him?*

*We sometimes forget that Jesus was a man like us; fully human and therefore subject to the foibles of this world, the people in it and the troubles of the future. The ultimate moment of suffering for him contained all three ingredients: pain, the world's misery and spiritual troubles too. It happened at the Cross. He went to the pain and suffering of crucifixion. In so doing he faced the mockery of the world; crucifixion was designed as public entertainment as well as punishment. He also suffered the ultimate spiritual problem: separation from God, his Father.*

*Why? Because he loves you, that's why. He asks that you partake of communion to remember what he did for you. He suffered the pain, he suffered the world, he suffered in spirit — for us. As you partake this morning, keep in mind what it cost to have this ceremony. Partake in an appropriate spirit, and know that he understands your troubles quite well — he was human too.*

## Glory

Daniel 7:13-14

*it is generally recognized that the Book of Daniel is the key to understanding biblical prophecy. This is not, in general, because Daniel is so clear – rather, it is the one bit of prophecy with a high level of explanation – from the highest level authority. The two verses we will use today are these.*

*"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.  
(Daniel 7:13-14 NASB)*

*Most readers of the New Testament have little trouble in unraveling these two verses.*

- *The "Son of Man" is clearly Jesus, the Christ. It was the title he adopted for himself as his favorite.*
- *The "Ancient of Days" – the phrase only is found in this chapter of Daniel; nowhere else in the entire Bible – is a clear reference to God the Father. (Remember: the ancient Jews did not have a clear view of the Trinity.)*

*The result of this meeting is a thrill for the Christian. There are three things that we see here.*

- *Dominion. The Son Of Man is given dominion, which elsewhere is used to indicate Lordship. He is the one we should hear; he is the one we should obey.*
- *Glory. One writer said the glory is to God as style is to an artist. It is hard in our civilization to see this. But if you ever get a chance to visit the redwood trees in Northern California you will find a particular pattern in some of them. It's called a Cathedral — a grove of trees 300 feet tall surrounding an empty space. The natural reaction of humans entering a Cathedral is to go absolutely silent, in awe of what God has done. Glory.*
- *Kingdom. This could be none other than the kingdom of God, the Church. Here it is prophesied that the church will never be destroyed, but as stated elsewhere, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father.*

*Communion is a reminder of how this is to be accomplished. Christ went through the experience of the Cross to the Kingdom of God. He was obedient to the Father; he is our Lord; he expects us to be obedient to his commands. Curiously, one of those commands given to us is that we are to do all things to the glory of God.*

*May we apply that to taking communion? Can it be done to the glory of God? If you do it according to his command, doing so in memory of him with the proper reverence and repentance, I submit that it can be done. Prepare yourself, therefore, for the memorial of the event which leads to dominion, glory and the kingdom of God forever.*

## Example

*He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way.  
(Psalms 25:9 NASB)*

*Perhaps the observation is so obvious that it is therefore seldom made. But it is true: every other spiritual leader the world has ever known tells you that he (or she) knows the way. They may point you to heaven, Nirvana, or reincarnation — but the point is, they point. Jesus of Nazareth quite deliberately put it differently: “I AM the Way.” If you don’t think so, consider this: all other spiritual leaders tell you which way to go. But in the ultimate spiritual conflict, death, none of them lead you in the way. True leaders go first. Jesus Christ led the way through death, burial and resurrection. He is therefore the firstborn from the dead, leading us in his ways. So the psalmist may say that he leads the humble in justice. For us he has led us in the resurrection, so he will lead us in delivering justice when he returns. In the meanwhile, we must practice what we have learned.*

*This observation is not complete without the second half of this verse; Jesus teaches. How does Jesus teach us? There are many ways. There are, of course, the Scriptures. These are taught to us by those who are appointed by the church. There are many other methods by which he teaches us, including answers to prayer. But in this instance he teaches us by ritual, by ceremony.*

*Teaching by ceremony has certain characteristics which make it a very powerful tool.*

- *It is sparingly done. Various denominations disagree on how many ceremonies are authorized in the Scriptures, but it’s a small number. It may be as little as two, the other one being baptism.*
- *Ceremony, rightly done, is simple — and therefore easy to understand, not requiring great learning.*
- *Ceremony deliberately appeals both to the head and the heart. It is not a “go through the motions” kind of thing. It touches the human soul.*

*Communion is taken from its prototype, Passover. The picture of Passover tells the same story, like a forecast. When Christ implemented communion, he told us to do it until he comes again. Considering Passover as the past tense, communion as present tense and the Great Judgment as future tense, we can see its meaning easily.*

*We know that the bread represents his body; the cup, his blood. The ceremony is to bring to the memory the sacrifice of Christ. It is a high form of teaching by example.*

- *By offering the perfect sacrifice, God teaches us that his standard for acceptance is sinless perfection. Nothing else will do. Only Christ ever met that standard.*
- *He also taught us that sin requires atonement; the debt must be paid.*
- *Then he taught us the greatest lesson of all: love. No greater love has a demand that he lay down his life for his friends — which is what Christ did for us.*

*There you have the head knowledge and the stirring of the heart. But there is one thing else the ceremony requires: your wholehearted participation. Do this in memory of Him; do it in a manner worthy of his memory.*

## *End of the Line*

*People who share a common profession often have stories that circulate within that profession. Such is the case with this story. It dates to World War II, where it was common among finance officers in the United States Army.*

*One of the duties of such an officer was to conduct the monthly payment to individuals. This was done in cash in those days; the problem has therefore gone away today. The difficulty was this: the line was long and those who felt that they were above such things would simply walk to the front of the line and demand to be paid. The person doing this was usually at least a colonel; the finance officer was rarely higher than a captain. It is very awkward asking a colonel to go to the end of a long line. But it can be done.*

*In this particular instance the colonel pulled up in a chauffeured staff car, walked to the front of the line and presented his ID card, asking to be paid. He felt a tap on the shoulder. Turning around he had no time to be annoyed — staring him in the face was Gen. Dwight Eisenhower. “Colonel, I think it best if we both go to the back of the line.” They did.*

*The story may be apocryphal, but it demonstrates a characteristic of leadership which can be found also in Jesus Christ. You will remember the Last Supper. It is the culmination of Christ’s leadership of the disciples; the last time he will have them all together, listening.*

- *It is a Passover meal. Indeed, not just “a” Passover meal — but “the” Passover meal. In this Passover, the real Lamb is the Lamb of God.*
- *It is the last chance for Christ to give instructions. If you look at those instructions they set in order the relationship between the church, Christ and God the Father.*
- *The most memorable event of this meal, however, is Christ washing the feet of the disciples. Eisenhower did not send the colonel to the end of the line; he took him there. Christ set the example of humility in washing his disciples’ feet.*

*Communion should hold the Last Supper as an example. How are we to approach this memorial meal derived from Passover?*

- *We must recognize in this meal the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.*
- *We must recognize the sacrifice made in all humility, and approach the throne of grace the same way.*
- *Like the disciples — remember Peter asking to be washed all over — we must approach it asking for the forgiveness of our sins.*

*Examine yourself. Set your heart and mind on the sacrifice of Christ, seeing his humility as an example for us. Commit yourself to repentance, and ask for forgiveness. Then take, in memory of the Lamb of God.*

## March 7

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### Commemoration

*It is Valentine's Day. It is a time of bustle and hurry; you have a reservation at the restaurant that must be met. The flowers have arrived and are being arranged on the table. Of course, there is chocolate in sufficient abundance that your doctor probably will warn you about it. He as you are heading out the door, your eyes wander to a corner of the living room next to the fireplace. There, looking a little bit too forlorn, is your Christmas tree. You give it a moment's thought, noticing some of the ornaments on the tree. There is one which commemorates the birth of your first son, who is now in his 40s. There are pictures in ornaments of your kids in Little League, school plays, vacation trips — even pictures of those who are no longer with us but are fondly remembered. The Christmas tree is usually a living collection of commemorations.*

*Commemoration. We can x-ray that word. The back portion, starting with "mem...", obviously comes from our word, "memory." If you give it a moment's thought, you'll recognize the prefix too. The prefix "co" implies something that we do together. Why together?*

- *Whether the memories are happy or sad, or both, it sometimes helps to have those around who remember with you. You stir each other and remind each other of details long forgotten.*
- *Just because an event is past doesn't mean that it's meaningless. We still celebrate the Fourth of July after more than 200 years.*
- *Sometimes, just having others around allows you to let out the emotions that the memory arouses. Occasionally we need permission to let our emotions show.*

*Communion, of course, is the commemoration of Christ's great sacrifice for us. He commanded that we celebrate it, and I think we can see why.*

- *Most obviously, there is the meaning that the event holds. By his atonement we are saved; we have received grace. That is certainly worth remembering.*
- *It also helps us stir up memories, very often memories which are unique to ourselves. We remember not only that he offers us grace, but the reasons we need it. We can repeat it in song, "love lifted even me."*
- *It also helps us reconnect with our faith. This is not somebody's theory about what God is like; it is the example that God has set.*

*The commemoration determines the style. As you partake this morning, do so in a worthy manner. Examine yourself; repent where needed; make amends as required. Then, knowing that his body is in the bread, that his blood in the cup, commemorate his sacrifice for you.*

## March 14

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### Advice

*It is a lesson that every Christian must learn. You come to a point in your life when you have some excellent advice to give to God; the question is, how to deliver it? There are several methods.*

- *The first method is probably the most obvious. You tell God your plan — your entire plan — and outline his part in it. This has the advantage of showing what a genius you are. It also allows God to participate.*

- *When that doesn't work, the second method arises. This time you tell God only part of your plan — the part of the plan where he participates, clearly outlining his responsibilities and the time he has to complete them. It's important to be explicit, but also to leave out the extraneous details. He is, after all, a busy God.*
- *When these have failed, usually with an annoying display of God showing you a better way, you adopt the third method. This consists of not telling God anything, but implementing your plan and assuming God knows what part to play. This is often referred to as the Wile E. Coyote method. It has the same consistent success rate.*

*The process of giving advice to God has certain flaws. The main thing that is objectionable is the sheer arrogance of giving advice to God in the first place. It has the attitude of, "hold my beer, God, and watch this!" As Paul illustrates it, you are the clay giving advice to the potter on what ought to be done. If you carry this through the implementation, the result is often some form of embarrassment. It's particularly the case when your wife asks you why you didn't ask her first. The one benefit of this experience is that you learn something: you recognize that you need help. You are not to be the giver of advice but the recipient of God's mercy.*

*That's the human condition. We're not perfect; we are all sinners and in need of a Savior God has provided for us our salvation, not of our own doing. This was done by Christ on the Cross. Now, if you will notice, we sometimes learn this lesson about giving advice to God more than once. If you wait a while without some sort of reminder, you forget what happened last time. For that reason God continues to remind us that we have accepted his offer of grace. Our salvation is not from ourselves, but from Him. We need to be reminded of this regularly.*

*Therefore he has given us communion. In the bread we see his body; in the cup we see his blood. He asks that we do this in remembrance of Him. It is important that we do it with the proper attitude. Therefore, examine yourself and see if He is reminding you of changes you need to make in your life. Repent and begin to make amends as may be needed. The bread and the cup are your reminders. Take them seriously, as they deserve.*

## Furnace

Isaiah 48:10

*It is a fact: the Christian is tried and refined in the furnace of affliction. If you want to know a man's character, listen to the stories he tells. At first you will be humorous but as you get to know him you'll find stories of affliction and suffering that really made him who he is. None of us is a fan of being afflicted; but affliction does carry with it some benefits.*

- *[Philippians 3:10] if you suffer for Christ, it means you're on the team. You are one of Christ's disciples. Many of us wonder about that; now you know.*
- *[First Peter 4:14] the Scriptures explicitly tell us here that when we suffer affliction for Christ, we are blessed by the Holy Spirit.*
- *[Second Corinthians 1:3-5] one of the great purposes of affliction is that in our suffering we learn how to comfort others who are going through the same thing. This builds up the church as well as building up the Christian.*

*It sometimes comes as a surprise to a Christian to find that Christ suffered through affliction as well. As the primary rule of conduct for a Christian is the imitation of Christ, it is good to know that he went through it too .*

- *[Hebrews 2:9-10] we are told that he was made perfect through suffering. The phrase does not mean that he was cured of sin, but rather shaped to God's purposes completely.*
- *[Hebrews 2:18] in particular, we are told that Christ suffered through temptation as only the truly righteous can.*
- *[First Peter 2:21] the apostle makes it clear here that much of Christ's work, including his suffering, is as an example for us.*
- *[First Peter 2:24] Peter makes this clear also: by his wounds you are healed. As was prophesied in the Old Testament, it is by Christ suffering that we are offered God's grace.*

*Communion reminds us of the suffering of Christ. The bread, which represents his body, reminds us of the beatings he received, the agony of carrying the cross and ultimately the crucifixion itself. Crucifixion, the doctors tell us, is a form of slow-motion drowning.*

*The wine, which represents his blood, reminds us of the great drops of blood he wept in the garden of Gethsemane. It reminds us of the bleeding from his head when they placed the crown of thorns upon it. Finally, it reminds us of the nails in his hands and feet and the spear wound to his side. We all know what it is to suffer. We need to remember that he suffered so that we might have God's grace. Therefore, as you partake this morning, do so in a serious and thoughtful manner as befits the memory of the Son of God suffering for us.*

## Reminder Meal

*To the best of my research, the Scripture nowhere includes a command to celebrate your wedding anniversary. It is not prohibited, of course. It seems that God determined that it would just be natural for us to do such celebrating and left it to us to arrange the details. So when you plan your wedding anniversary dinner, you don't plan to go to an ordinary coffee shop. You plan to go to a nice restaurant. You allow plenty of time as you will not be in a hurry. What do you have when you do that?*

- *You have a night of memories. Your author remembers the fact that his wife was an hour late to our wedding — and well worth the wait.*
- *You have a night for expressions of love. Wedding anniversary gifts, for example, do not ordinarily include a vacuum cleaner. Jewelry speaks love more fluently.*
- *You have a night for the renewal of promises. You remember what you promised her then and try to find a new way to repeat it.*

*We may consider the matter also from the point of view of the church. You will recall, of course, that the church is described as the bride of Christ. In the book of Revelation, we see the preparations made for the great wedding feast between the Lamb of God and His bride. A good deal of our doctrine about marriage comes from this description.*

*The practical side of the bride of Christ is that it's an example to us in our own marriages. The primary passage for this is Ephesians 5:22-32. This passage is much debated these days. But surely we can extract from it the fact that Christ gave his life — the maximum expression of love — for his bride, the church. The church is you and me. So we have the opportunity to commemorate his love for us, just as we would remember our wedding anniversary .*

*We have a spiritual wedding between Christ and his church. Perhaps it would surprise you to think of it this way, but we also have a reminder meal. That's communion. Like our anniversary dinners, it is not an ordinary meal — we don't celebrate communion with a potluck dinner. Rather, the meal is highly symbolic [even if you believe in transubstantiation]. It is a time to remember what Christ has done for you. In reply it is a time when you can express your love for Christ. We do this by renewing the promises we made when we first came to him. Consider these things. Have you confessed your sins to him? Have you done your best to repent of these sins? Did that include any restitution which you could make? Perhaps more important, did it include reconciliation with your Christian brother or sister? Consider these things well, and then partake in a worthy manner.*

## Identification

*The oldest known copies of the Old Testament are, as is well known, taken from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most of the fragments of the scrolls are kept in a museum in Israel. Just before it opened, the Museum of the Bible in Washington purchased five such fragments from a private collector. They had been on display for a few months when some of the experts affiliated with the Museum challenged the authenticity of these scraps. The fragments were sent to a lab in Germany, which discovered that they were in fact fake.*

*It's a problem for every museum in the world: ancient artifacts are expensive; fake copies are cheap. Even with the best of expertise, it is hard to tell on some artifacts just which ones are real and which ones are not. It is likely that the Museum of the Bible was defrauded out of a large amount of money for these five fragments. Moral of the story? It's hard to tell the real thing from the clever fraud.*

*The same thing is true for Christians. How do you tell a "real" Christian from a hypocritical fake? It may seem to be a difficult question, but here's a little bit of guidance you might apply.*

- *If you claim to be a Christian, your life in the body should reflect that. One good test for this is your marriage. Are you faithful to your wife/husband? Do you care for and love them?*
- *If you claim to be a Christian, your attitude towards the things of this world should be the same as that which Christ had. What claim do material things have on your life? Do you really have to have a much larger speedboat?*
- *If you claim to be a Christian, there are also spiritual matters to be observed. One particularly good example of this is your attitude about forgiveness. Is it something that comes rarely and is withheld frequently, like a grudge? Or are you quick to forgive and quick to reconcile?*

*The history of every bit of fake art and artifact includes a moment when the fraud is presented to the museum for sale. At some point, someone brings forward those fragments that supposedly came from the Dead Sea Scrolls and presents them as the real thing, for sale. Fraudulent Christians do the same thing: they present themselves at communion, claiming to be genuine disciples of Christ. It's hard to tell the real from the fake; after all, each and every one of us is a sinner. But perhaps you could apply these tests to your self.*

- *Do you live like one who has received the body of Christ, recognizing the suffering of your Lord and Savior, who died for your sins? If you feel like you deserved it, may we suggest that you think again?*
- *Do you live like one who has been washed of his sins by the blood of Christ? If you live like someone who thinks this is trivial, may we suggest that you think again?*

*When you take communion, you proclaim that you are the real thing: a genuine disciple of Christ. If you are not, please — do not partake. Do not take lightly that which cost your Lord his life. You claim to be a Christian — are you?*

## Vine

*It may come as a surprise to most Christians to find that wine occupied a more important place in the society of the time of Christ. There are number of reasons for the change.*

- 1. In the ancient world, wine was one of the few things that was safe to drink. There was no chlorination in the water. You will recall Paul's advice to Timothy to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach. They didn't know about bacteria, but they knew about dysentery.*
- 2. Another factor is this: it was difficult to preserve food at this time — no refrigerators. But wine kept quite well. It was a way of preserving the value of your grape harvest throughout the year.*
- 3. In Jewish society of the time, it would be associated with Passover. It was thus a part of the ritual which celebrated the rescue of the Jewish people.*

*It is not surprising, therefore, that Christ made use of grapes, wine and vines in his teaching. One particular instance of this is found in the Gospel of John:*

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."  
(John 15:1-7 NASB)*

*Please note that he offered this teaching on the same night during which he instituted the Lord's Supper. His disciples would've recognized this illustration, and connected it with the use of wine in Passover as well. Just as the wine in Passover was a symbolic representation of God's mercy, so the wine in the Lord's Supper would point their minds back to this passage.*

*Communion is, in a very real sense, but time to test whether or not you are abiding in the vine. It is a time for us to reflect upon the fruits of Christ in our lives. As we partake, we acknowledge the body and blood of Christ, given for us. The natural result of this is Christian fruitfulness. So let me ask you:*

- Are your prayers being answered or ignored?*
- Do you see growth in your life in such areas as meditation and study?*

*In communion you acknowledge his sacrifice. In so doing, you proclaim him as your Lord as well as your Savior. Are you still connected to the vine? Examine yourself, and then partake.*

## Manasseh

*(A brief note about the Apocrypha) The quotation from the Scripture today comes from the section which is not commonly found in most Protestant Bibles. It is called the Apocrypha. Generally speaking, Roman Catholics identify it as part of the Bible; Protestants do not. In this particular instance we have an excellent example of repentance in prayer, whether you consider it Scripture or not.*

*The book we will be quoting was supposedly written by Manasseh, King of Israel. He was the son of Hezekiah, one of the great kings of Israel. The Babylonians captured him; this prayer was supposed to have been written by him while in captivity. Here is part of it:*

*Now therefore I bow the knee of my heart, beseeching you of grace. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge my iniquities: but, I humbly beseech you, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with my iniquities. Be not angry with me forever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me into the lower parts of the earth. For you, O Lord, are the God of those who repent; and in me you will show all your goodness: for you will save me, that am unworthy, according to your great mercy. And I will praise the forever all the days of my life: for all the army of heaven does sing your praise, and your is the glory forever and ever. Amen.  
(Prayer of Manasseh 1:11-15 WEBA)*

*It may serve as well as a modern form of prayer of repentance. The first thing I would have you note is that it comes from the heart. Manasseh then goes on to give us these three points:*

- *He admits his sin — straight out. There is no beating about the bush; no attempt to smooth things over with God.*
- *He is just as straightforward when it comes to asking for forgiveness. He does not approach the throne of grace meekly, but with boldness.*
- *In so doing, he also acknowledges the character of God. In particular he recognizes him as a God of “very great mercy.” His plea for forgiveness does not depend on his own virtue but God’s mercy. He is not asking because Manasseh is so good; he is asking because God’s mercy is so great.*

*Please note one particular phrase: “For you, O Lord, are the God of those who repent.” Have you ever wondered why God didn’t restrict communion to only the really good people? Apart from the difficulty in telling who is “really good,” such a restriction would limit God’s sovereignty to those who are such. The rest of us sinners would have no appeal to God. So to speak, we couldn’t get an appointment to be heard.*

*We see this echoed in the New Testament. Christ came to “seek and save the lost.” Communion tells us the price of that quest. In simple pictures and participation, we see the atonement of Christ played out before us. In the bread we see his body, wounded for our sins. In the cup we see his blood, shed for us. His forgiveness is thereby offered to all.*

*Therefore, come before the God of those repent. Seek his mercy as only the repentant can do. As you partake this morning, remember the price that was paid because he is the God of those who repent. He payed it all — for you, and for me.*

## Seeing

Some people have a distinct problem with communion. It's not that they don't "understand" what's going on. The ceremony itself is quite simple, and the explanation of the elements of communion well known. His body is represented by the bread; his blood, by the cup. It's a simple formula and easily memorized. But most human beings like to go beyond the simple so that they really understand what's going on behind the scenes. Two of the solutions that people reach in this quest are these.

- Some say it's "just a ritual." Follow the directions, it's what God wants you to do. There is no understanding it, just do it. This tends to leave people — particularly Americans — much less satisfied than they would like to be.
- Others see it as some dark and mysterious proceeding which can only be understood by the truly mature and serious Christians. The main question they have is, "why did God inflict this deep dark secret ritual upon us ordinary people?"

Maybe the problem is not that God didn't get this memorial right. Maybe it's a case of us poor human beings looking at the problem wrong.

By way of example, think back to the last time you went to the doctor's office. If he wanted to examine your heart, he reached into the freezer to find one of those stethoscopes that are numbingly cold. He applied it to the most sensitive spot on your skin so that he could hear your heart skip a few beats, and then returned to normal. To get the right diagnosis, he had to use the right instrument. If he wants to examine your ears, he uses that little flashlight with the disposable cones on the end. For those occasions where he wants to look at your bones, there is an x-ray machine. Using the right instrument to observe gets the right observation. So what instrument must we use to understand communion?

It's the same instrument we use to understand God correctly: a pure heart.

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*  
(Matthew 5:8 NASB)

The word translated "pure" in this verse is the Greek word from which we get our word, "catharsis." It can also be translated, "clean." So how do we go about getting a clean heart? We might try David's method. You will recall that when he committed adultery with Bathsheba he went to God to ask forgiveness, as recorded in Psalm 51. Here's the key verse.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*  
(Psalms 51:10 NASB)

Perhaps you see it now. By yourself, you are not capable of creating a clean heart within. But do not be discouraged; ask God for that clean heart and he will give it to you willingly. Take the time to do that now. Then approach the throne of grace with that clean heart and see how much he loves you. He gave his body and his blood so that you might be forgiven; so that you might be redeemed; so that you might be a child of God forever.

## Slow of Heart

Luke 24:25-26

*It's a question nobody wants to ask: "why was it necessary that Christ suffered on the cross?" We acknowledge that he did suffer, died and rose again. But the question of "why" is when we are more reluctant to tackle. It sounds too, well, "theological."*

*We can gain some help in answering the question from a look at the Greek in this passage. The word translated here as "necessary" can also be translated in other ways.*

- *It can be seen as something which is essentially fitting. It puts the pieces of the puzzle together; without it you have a string of facts and no solution.*
- *It can also be seen as something divinely necessary. It is God's order of things to happen that includes suffering, and his plan is not perfect without it.*

*The argument made here starts with one of the major reasons for the suffering: it is prophesied in the Old Testament. All the prophets testify to it; it is therefore divinely necessary to happen. We see within it the reason for the cross: the Atonement. The entire Old Testament shows over and over again that if sin is to be dealt with, there must be sacrifice. That sacrifice has to be unblemished; we have to sacrifice the best, not the worst.*

*Sin must be judged; the law must be honored. The suffering of Christ was necessary to manifest God's justice. It is essentially fitting for that reason. But there is one more reason that we may find. It is essentially fitting that the one who suffered for us is now entitled to be lord over us. The suffering of Christ on the cross fitted him out to be our sovereign Lord over the church.*

*That is pretty deep theology for a short communion meditation. What might be more important to us today is what our reaction should be. Christ tells these men that their reaction is wrong for two reasons:*

- *They are foolish. They are taking the most serious situation in human history and treating it as if it were local gossip and story. They take the sacrifice too lightly.*
- *They are "slow of heart." They may have been quick to receive the blessing of Christ in his teaching and his miracles, but they are slow to commit to believing what the prophets told them. There's a difference between a girlfriend and a wife — commitment.*

*But, as always, Christ stays with them to ensure their salvation. But please notice the moment at which they recognize him for who he is. It is when he breaks bread and gives it to them.*

*Communion is the physical reminder of the suffering of Christ on the cross. We see in the bread his broken body; in the cup we see his shed blood. The signs of our collective memory are in our hands. They are meant to awaken our understanding. In these symbols we are to see, once again, the suffering that Christ endured so that we might have redemption. Think again on these things, and then partake in a worthy manner.*

## Caterer

Mark 14:12-16

Let us suppose that you have been asked to be the caterer at the most important meal in history: the Lord's Supper. Your first reaction might be that you would leave nothing to chance; every detail would be checked and double checked. Our Lord did it somewhat differently.

Christ's method relied on the providence of God. Let's look at the first requirement: just exactly where are you going to hold the supper? Well, here are the instructions that Christ gave two of his disciples:

- You're going to go into Jerusalem — a city crawling with pilgrims there to celebrate Passover — and look for a guy carrying a particular type of water jug.
- Don't ask the man anything — just follow him until he goes into a house. This is beginning to sound like you'll need a trenchcoat.
- When he goes into that house, locate the owner of that house.
- Then, tell that man to show you the room which he should have prepared for Passover. And in the same instruction, let him know that "The Teacher" will need it for his Passover supper tonight.

Hospitality is a virtue in the ancient world. The man probably would've felt very honored at the occasion. But if he's anything like you and me, he might've appreciated a little warning first. But amazingly enough, the man is ready for them.

About that water jug — maybe it's not just a locator tag but actually has a purpose. After all, houses in those days did not have running water. The servants had to haul the water in jars. Maybe this was the jar that contained the water with which Christ washed his disciples' feet.

Is all this just a coincidence? No, it is a series of providences. Foolish people sometimes will tell you that God created the universe and then left it alone. He did not; he created and he sustains it to this day. It is not miraculous; it is the character of God on display. Despite what appears to be the random character of Christ's instructions, the disciples found everything as he said it would be.

Providence teaches us much. It first teaches us that God is the God of the details, not just the grand sweep of things. It is not only plausible that he pays attention to your life, it is certain. You are a part of his creation, one of his children, why would he not care for you?

But a more important reason for Providence in this case comes in steadying the faith of the disciples. No matter how bad things look, they can see that God has all the details in his hands. Things will work out the way He wants them to. Communion celebrates the death of Christ, so that we might remember his atonement. He reminds us when we do this to remember him until he comes again. Communion also celebrates the greatest victory in history — the resurrection. Taken together they tell you that God is in control of the big things; he is also providing those little things for us, like the guy with the jug. Miracles like the resurrection show you God's power; his attention to detail in your life shows you his love. Remember this as you partake.

## Suffering

*In the act of taking communion, the Christian acknowledges the truth of many of the things of the New Testament. One such acknowledgment is that of the suffering of Christ.*

- *In so doing, we share vicariously the suffering of Christ. We acknowledge the cup to be the blood and the bread to be the body of Christ, bleeding and broken for us. We acknowledge that he did this on our behalf. In so doing, we reject the shame of suffering, and take it upon ourselves. We identify with Christ.*
- *We also acknowledge that — as he suffered — so also shall we suffer for the cause of Christ. How much, how often — who can say? Some of our brothers and sisters have had the privilege of being martyrs for the faith; others have reached their limit at being ridiculed for being a Christian. But suffering is the lot of those who identify with Christ.*
- *We do this willingly — not as one who is resigned to his fate, but as one who has taken up the cause of Christ. Where he leads us, we will follow.*

*Perhaps you never thought of it this way, but by taking communion you acknowledge that Christ's suffering is greater than ours.*

- *We, to some extent, deserve the suffering that we get in this life. It is at least useful as a corrective to sin. He had no sin; he not only suffered but did so in the knowledge that he was innocent.*
- *It is fair to say that most Christians don't volunteer to suffer; they see it is something that just happens to them. But Christ went willingly to the cross for the sake of our salvation.*
- *Christ went through this suffering not by force or by temptation but willingly — it is for our benefit, not his, that he died on the cross.*

*So what, we may ask, does he ask us to do in return? He asks us to celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance. In remembrance of what?*

- *In remembrance of his body — "which is for you." (First Corinthians 11:24) He came to this planet, incarnate in a human body, born a baby in Bethlehem — for you. The one who spoke and the worlds began became human for your sake.*
- *In remembrance of his blood — which he tells us is the new covenant. God has established a new way to reach mankind. No longer do you have to be born Jewish; you only have to be born again.*

*We have been doing this for 2000 years; when will we stop? When our Lord and Savior returns to this earth in power and glory. You acknowledge the past and all that it means to you; you also acknowledge his soon and coming return. Do so in a worthy manner.*

## Floods

*So the story goes: an elderly saint dies and goes to heaven. Upon arrival, his guardian angel asks him if there is anything special they could do to welcome him. "Well, I have always wanted to give a public talk about my experiences in the Johnstown flood. If you could arrange an audience for that I would really appreciate it." So the angel gets to work and soon the day arrives. 50,000 people are waiting for him to talk. Just before the man steps onto the speaker's platform, the angel takes him aside and tells him, "I think you ought to know — Noah is in the audience."*

*Many of us had a similar feeling to that speaker. Have you ever been at a church event where people stood up and gave their testimonies? It often happens that the testimonies go from better to worse. When it comes time to call on Joe Average Christian, he finds his testimony is rather tame compared to those he's heard already. You can feel rather inadequate when listening to someone else's testimony; you obviously had no idea how to be such a wicked sinner. Sometimes, telling testimonies is a race to the bottom.*

*Let's look at the facts. If you really want to see a sinner, all you need to do is look in your bathroom mirror. We are all, each and every one of us, sinners. If someone tells you they are a Christian they just told you they are a sinner. The important question is not, "what kind of sinner are you?" The important question is, "are you a sinner?" Please note that this is a "Yes/No" question.*

*This means, of course, that all of those of us who answer "yes" are in need of a Savior. Because of this, God has set before us the same covenant to apply to all of us. There are no such things as "worthy sinners." Each and every one of us gets the same offer: the covenant of Christ. It's binary; take it or leave it.*

*This covenant, Christ tells us, is a covenant of blood (see Matthew 26:28). It is by Christ's blood that we are forgiven of our sins. It is therefore altogether fitting that we should remember this sacrifice on a regular basis — it is the core of the faith. So we gather and take this cup and this bread. The cup is for his blood; the bread, his body. We are told to do it in remembrance of him until he comes again. It is the center of the faith; it is the most serious thing we do in worship. Therefore, examine yourself and see if your sin stands between you and God. Repent; ask forgiveness and plan such reparation as might be needed. Then, partake in a worthy manner.*

## Grandmother

*Every child should be given a full complement of grandparents. Despite the brilliant “new thinking” of our day, grandchildren learn from their grandparents in ways that are different. Such a case came to a nine-year-old girl. Having seen her grandmother’s enthusiasm for sewing, she decided she would like to learn how to do it herself. Grandma said she would help, so the young lady went out and purchased a pattern for her first garment. Unfortunately, the pattern in question was well beyond a beginner’s ability. As you can imagine, the garment did not take shape in the way the picture on the cover said it would.*

*This might’ve been very discouraging, but grandma’s patience was up to the task. Each night, while her granddaughter slept, she would remove the awkward and clumsy stitching her granddaughter had put in. She would replace it with her own, well practiced stitches. As a result, the garment turned out to be quite serviceable and looked quite well-made. It was not until many years later that the young lady learned what her grandmother had done. By her patient work, her grandmother had instilled in her a love for sewing which still persists to this day. Patience is often thought of as being a passive virtue. Its synonym seems to be, “just wait.” But this is not always the case; patience is often an active virtue.*

*Patience comes in a number of forms. We can see it in these ways if we will simply look for it. Here are some thoughts:*

- *Compassion is a form of patience, especially with those who are young or those who are new to the faith. Beginners make mistakes. These might be pointed out, but it is much more compassionate to point them out after having fixed them. The beginner learns not only what to do correctly but that you care about it.*
- *Perseverance is a form of patience. This is true even if you can’t see an end to your perseverance. Many people conclude that if something can’t be done in their own lifetime, it cannot be done. But this is false! Sometimes Paul needs to pass his tasks on to Timothy.*
- *Patience can also be a demonstration of mercy (see 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:16). Often enough our patience is sorely tried by the self-righteous. It is hard to be merciful with such person. It is also necessary; as necessary as long as need be.*

*Communion is a reminder of God’s patience with us. It begins by reminding us of his mercy, new every morning. We receive communion on a regular basis so that we might remember that his mercy is available. Even for those who need it 7×70, it remains available.*

*It’s also a reminder of his perseverance with us. He has placed on us no limit as to the number of times we can repent; he has also placed no limit on us as to how long it will take us to come around. The God who created heaven and earth evidently has a bit more patience than we do.*

*But that patience will not last forever. We know, as part of communion, that we are to take this bread and cup in remembrance of him “until he comes again.” Judgment day is coming. Until then, God is patient with you. Remember that — and then eat and drink in remembrance of him.*

## Criminal

*My wife and I do prison ministry<sup>1</sup>. It is interesting to see the reaction of other Christians when they find this out. A few people see it as heroic, but most of them react like we've gotten our white gloves very dirty. For most Christians, there are three rules for handling criminals.*

- *Do not touch. You don't want to get involved with the criminal, so you leave them strictly alone in the hands of armed officers.*
- *Dispose of properly. They should be put away someplace where they are out of sight, out of mind and no trouble at all.*
- *No punishment is too severe. Often our sense of justice is twisted to match our desire for vengeance.*

*As a result, inmates very often find themselves abandoned even by their own families. It is a very miserable thing to be a prisoner in an American prison.*

*Consider, then, the suffering that Christ went through. Our system of punishment is relatively mild compared to that of the conquering Romans. If you will go back to Isaiah, chapter 53, you will see some of the pain and suffering our Lord went through for our sake.*

- *He was "despised and forsaken." (Verse 3.) Most of his disciples had indeed forsaken him. Isaiah describes the reaction as being one of hiding your face from the man, like you can't even stand to look at him.*
- *People thought that he was "smitten by God." How often are you told someone deserved what he got because he's a secret sinner? That's the reaction they had to Jesus.*
- *Look at verse five; see the verbs that are used to describe his affliction. You have "pierced", "crushed", "scourged". This describes the beatings of the Romans and the spear in his side as he was being crucified.*

*It was a brutal death; a messy death full of human vengeance. Why did it happen? It was necessary for him to die to be our atoning sacrifice. In short, He did it for us.*

*Communion is done in remembrance of his death (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:24-25). It is a curious contrast; Christ's death was very messy and ugly — and communion is rather neat and tidy. A symbolic representation of things usually is quite a bit tidier than the reality. Perhaps this eases our task of preparing and taking communion.*

*As you partake, remember that the cup represents his blood spattered all over the ground. The bread represents his body, beaten and shattered brutally. He died so that you might live eternally. Remember this as you partake.*

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<sup>1</sup> [BehindTheWalls.com](http://BehindTheWalls.com)

**June 13**

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## *Innocents*

*Matthew 2:16*

*An unusual painting of the Slaughter of the Innocents.*



*"The Massacre of the Innocents," an 1824 painting by Léon Cogniet.*

*The first thing you expect to see in the painting on this subject is a tableau of soldiers running amok. You see very little of that, happening just behind the inadequate hiding place the woman is using. The painter has chosen to emphasize the effects of their action rather than show us the soldiers themselves. The soldiers, after all, are nothing but political pawns.*

*The figure of the woman, on the other hand, dominates the painting. If you are perceptive, the thing that you will see first is her stare — directly into your eyes. You can see the terror she has; the soldiers are coming to kill her baby. You can also see the despair. She is barefoot; she has to carry a baby and the soldiers will be so much faster than she can run. Her eyes turn to you, silently begging for help. She's cornered; no place to run and a poor place to hide.*

*Look also at the child's eyes. His mother's hand is over his mouth, forbidding him to make a noise — why? The infant is bewildered by his mother's actions in the clamor going on around him. He is helpless; he is frightened; therefore he is terrified.*

*Our reaction is one of instant sympathy. Why do we sympathize with the victims in this situation?*

- *Built into each of us is a natural reaction to an infant. If you think not, watch what happens when a mother brings an infant onto the playground at school. The girls all gather around the baby. There are smiles on each face. God designed us to love and protect the infant. The slaughter of the innocents cuts across everything we know and feel about babies.*
- *There is also our sense of justice. This is not an unfortunate accident; if an infant dies in a traffic accident we are, of course, sympathetic. If an infant is slaughtered by the agents of the government we are outraged.*
- *Particularly for those who have felt the responsibility of great authority, the reaction also includes our revulsion of abuse of authority. Just because you're the king doesn't mean you get to slaughter anybody you particularly dislike.*

*For these reasons we are outraged at the slaughter of the innocent.*

*Consider then, the ultimate slaughter of innocent — the crucifixion of Christ. He was completely innocent; sinless. It's not like he was innocuously standing around; he had established himself as someone exceptional by his miracles, particularly his healing miracles. We would like to think today that such a man would be highly valued, applauded and protected — a national asset, if you will. His execution was an abuse of power by a cynical Roman governor, egged on by his manipulators. Our natural reaction should be one of complete outrage.*

*Remember that today as you partake of communion. The bread represents his body, the cup, his blood — a sacred body, innocent blood. The holy, innocent one who was sacrificed for our sins is shown to us in these emblems. As you partake, remember it was not just any body who died for us. It was the son of God in the flesh, sacrificed for our sins. Be outraged at the slaughter of the innocent; be grateful for the salvation of the guilty.*

## Everyone Eligible

When talking to someone who doesn't know much about Christianity, it is common to encounter certain expectations of just what it takes to become a Christian. Some people feel that a certain number of good deeds is a requirement. You have to pass the entrance exam, so to speak. This takes a number of forms:

- "I'm as good as you are..." If I can compare myself to somebody who thinks he's going to heaven, and I decide that I'm better than he is, I get in!
- "I went to the right church when I was a kid." In other words, I have the right family credentials.
- "I took care of that... I made a big offering to the church." It's just a matter of knowing how much they want.

The only problem with this particular theory is that it's false. That's not how God works at all. There is the other end of the spectrum, however: those who think they're not getting in heaven. Why?

- "I've done something completely unforgivable."
- "I've committed the unforgivable sin (whatever that is.)"

It appears there are socially acceptable sins as well as socially unacceptable sins. God makes no such distinction.

God's method is based on a different point of view.

- Sins must be paid for. That's why the ancient Israelites had animal sacrifices prescribed for them. Ultimately, however, it would take the sacrifice of Christ to do what the animal sacrifices could not — take away sin.
- Nothing you can do will take away sin. This is why the Cross was necessary. Only God could deal with our sin. It was out of his great love for mankind that Christ went to the Cross.

That's why communion is open to all who believe. It is a reflection of the fact that God's grace is open to "whosoever will."

- As you take the bread, remember that this represents his body. Out of God's great love it was given over to death for you, and for me.
- As you take the cup, remember this represents his blood, shed for you. Only God's great love would send his Son to the Cross for our salvation.

Finally, as you do, give thanks to God. Our theories about how to handle sin don't work; his way works for everyone. Therefore, give praise and thanks to God for what he has done for us.

## Rope

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to **help** in time of need.  
(Hebrews 4:16 NASB)



In the verse above, please note the word which is highlighted in color. It's translated "help" in most versions of the Bible. It's a more interesting word in the Greek than it is in English. The Greek word is *boetheia*, which is more correctly translated into English as the phrase, "frapping rope." This, of course, would puzzle most readers in English. What kind of rope is that? It's a technical term used by sailors to describe the rope which is not part of the standing rigging of the ship. It's a rope that's just lying around loose. Such ropes have a number of purposes; in the original Greek usage these ropes were used to bind the ship's planks together during a storm.

A rope can be a really useful thing. The picture here is that of German sailors being rescued by the English sailors aboard the HMS Dorsetshire in 1941. The sailors were on board the German battleship *Bismarck* when she was sunk by the British. Notice that there are several ropes over the side that the German sailors can hang on until rescued.

So, if you're going to be rescued from the angry wave, you're going to need three things:

- Your rescuer is going to need a ship to stand on. There is no sense in grabbing the rope when there's another drowning man at the other end. As Christians we know this; no amount of effort by mankind is able to produce our salvation. The other end of our rope of salvation is in the hands

of God the Father.

- Obviously, you also need a rope. You need something that connects you with salvation. That's something for the Christian is the atonement Christ wrought on the Cross.
- You also need a sailor willing to throw the rope. For the Christian, that is none other than Jesus Christ himself, the bridge between humanity and God.

It is likely enough that if you were rescued from drowning that way you would remember the occasion. You might even have an annual celebration of the time you were rescued. The Christian has such a celebration of the time he was rescued from sin and death. It's called communion. We remember and honor our salvation by Christ with the bread which symbolizes his body, beaten and bruised for us. We remember and honor our salvation by Christ with the cup, which symbolizes his blood, shed for all mankind. Do this remembering what Christ has done for you — and the price he paid.

## Monument



*In the heart of Washington D.C. — a city full of patriotic monuments — stands one of the strangest examples of patriotic remembrance. It is a rough pillar topped with two cranes wrapped in barbed wire.*

*It is the National Japanese-American Memorial. The crane is a well-known symbol of the Japanese people. The barbed wire represents the internment of the Japanese people during World War II. The carvings set the context for being a patriotic memorial to those Japanese-Americans who served in the American military during World War II. Over 33,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry served. It is generally agreed today that the internment of the Japanese in large camps in remote locations was a serious mistake by the United States government. The camps are often remembered today; the veterans who served are largely passed away and often forgotten.*

*Can you imagine being a young Japanese man, incarcerated in one of those camps, volunteering to join the United States Army? Is it not likely that you would meet with resistance from your friends and family? You would be doing something that might be seen as very unpopular, or at least a little bit strange. Yet today we recognize these young men as patriots. Sometimes it is best to withhold judgment until all the facts are in.*

*Consider, then, the reaction of Christ's disciples to the events of the Cross. Just a few days earlier they had entered Jerusalem in triumphal fashion. People laying down palm branches before Jesus, shouting "hosanna" and blessing his name. Could his disciples have possibly foreseen the Cross? It is fairly certain they did not, despite His warnings. The question had to go through their minds: "how could this possibly happen?" Jesus went from triumphant to common criminal in a matter of a few days.*

*Often enough we do things in response to the expectations of those around us. If we don't, people are surprised and condemn us, at least behind our backs. Jesus knew this would happen, and went willingly to the Cross. It was not just pain and suffering at the Cross; it was social rejection. He died among the worst. For a human being who loves others so much, this may have been the most painful part of his death.*

*Jesus accepted this, and went to his death for our sake. As you partake of communion this morning, remember that his suffering included something that most of us cannot imagine. He was rejected by all of the society around him. He did this deliberately, so that you and I might have full salvation. His body and blood are on display for us in the elements of communion so that we might be reminded of his sacrifice. There was a physical sacrifice and also an emotional sacrifice. He did this out of God's great love for us. We then, remember. It is our Memorial of his sacrifice.*

## Shewbread

*"Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. "You shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. "You shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, even an offering by fire to the LORD. "Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. "It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, his portion forever."  
(Leviticus 24:5-9 NASB)*

*Who avoid spending any great amount of time reading through the Levitical law of the Old Testament. It seems rather pointless in the days of the New Testament, and rather detailed in things that need no further detail. But in this instance we have something which is a forerunner of communion. It is never specifically referenced as such in the New Testament, but we can learn a few things about communion by examining the bread presented to God, commonly called "shewbread."*

- *To begin with, we note that there are 12 loaves to be laid out before God. It takes no great insight to equate these 12 loaves with the 12 tribes of Israel. We can therefore say that these loaves are to represent all of God's people. Communion is like that; it is designed to include all of God's people.*
- *Note, please, that this bread was to be always present before the Lord. It was even supposed be presented on a pure gold table. Both of these represent the same thing: the eternal nature of this bread sacrifice to God. Communion is to be celebrated "until he comes." This reminds us of the eternal nature of Christ's sacrifice for us; he did it once, for all of us, for all time.*
- *The bread itself was to be left on the table until the next Sabbath, when it was replaced by a new set of loaves. The old ones were to be eaten by the priests. Perhaps you never thought of this in terms of communion before, but please remember that we are a royal priesthood. In this sacrifice he provides for his priests, just as communion reminds us that in his bodily sacrifice he provided salvation for us.*
- *The bread was to be covered with frankincense. The Book of Revelation tells us this symbolically means the prayers of the saints. Communion, of course, should be bathed in prayer. More than that, it is said to be a memorial offering by fire. We can easily see the memorial portion; the bread of communion reminds us of the bodily sacrifice of Christ, and we partake in memory of Him. The sacrifice by fire requires a little more explanation. It is usually associated with the phrase "soothing aroma." If you have ever smelled fresh bread baking you can easily picture that aroma arising to God. Perhaps both of these things are pictures of our prayers.*
- *In other parts the Bible (particularly Ezekiel) the bread is referred to as "the bread of the Presence." It is no great stretch to look at this as a reminder of the Incarnation. We recall Christ telling his disciples at the Last Supper, "This is my body."*

*In the ancient picture of shewbread we see God's eternal purpose: the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. As you partake today, remember not only what he did but that God purposed this before time began. It is not history that just happened. It was the divine plan from the very beginning — and it shows you his great love for us.*

## *Boiling Water*

*The scene is a familiar one in western movies. The country doctor comes in to deliver the baby. The first thing he does is order the husband to “boil water-lots of water.” The scene goes back at least to John Ford’s classic Western Stagecoach, and has been used many times since. Have you ever wondered why the doctor tells that guy to boil all that water?*

*John Wayne’s doctor explained it quite clearly: “It keeps them occupied and out of your hair until you’re done.” Now you know!*

*There are two general reasons why you assign a task to someone:*

- *One possibility is that you simply want it done.*
- *Another possibility is that you want some particular person to do it — like boiling water.*

*Teachers understand this. It makes a difference whether or not you just want it done versus whether or not it is instructional.*

*Communion shows that aspect. It is hardly possible that God needs us to bring him glory in communion. But it is highly likely that his primary purpose in requiring communion is to benefit us, not Him. He wants us to learn and practice something. He does not want us to do communion as much as experience it.*

*So why would he require communion on a regular basis? It is for our benefit.*

- *It keeps foremost in our minds the core of the faith: the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. You should know what you’re talking about — and that’s what Christians should talk about.*
- *It keeps you humble. You didn’t save yourself; you did not earn your own salvation. It is the free gift of God. Communion reminds you of that.*
- *It unites you with all other Christians, and thus strengthens the church. Christianity is not a solo flight; we are in it together. Communion makes us strong, together.*

*So we might ask what God wants us to do during communion. Consider these three thoughts.*

- *Contemplate the death of Christ. Remember his suffering on your behalf. Appreciate the price he paid to give you the free gift of salvation.*
- *Examine yourself for pride. In particular, look out for the thought that you must somehow be superior to other people because, after all, you’re a real Christian. Christ died for “whosoever will.”*

- *If you have anything against your Christian brother or sister, plan to remedy it as soon as possible. Make that commitment to God that you will be at peace with all those who claim the name of Christ.*

*As you partake, do so in a reverent, worthy manner. Reflect on the sacrifice of Christ; reflect on what you should be and how you should treat others. Then partake of the body and blood of your Lord and Savior.*

## *Washed in the Blood*

*I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."  
(Revelation 7:14 NASB)*

*Are you washed in the blood,  
In the soul cleansing blood of the Lamb?  
Are your garments spotless?  
Are they white as snow?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

*This chorus was at one time a very familiar one to most Christians in the English-speaking church. It was not alone in referencing the idea being washed in the blood; there were other well-known hymns as well.*

- *Nothing but the blood of Jesus*
- *Power in the Blood*
- *Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed*
- *The Old Rugged Cross*

*These, and hundreds of other hymns were commonplace to Christians of the time. You seldom hear the phrase, "the blood of the Lamb," today. I leave it to the listener to speculate why; we simply bring it to mind here because it's important. The hymns of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided for the average Christian a sure method of memorizing the doctrine of his church. It was not uncommon for the layman in the church of that time to have a sixth grade education or less; hymns were a convenient form of memorizing the truths of the gospel. They also provided a connection to the profound emotions experienced in salvation.*

*There are certain things we can easily pick up from this verse.*

- *First, there is the emphasis on blood. We are to remember that Christ died in a bloodbath way, with extreme pain. Salvation is not without price; God paid that price in the form of his son.*
- *Next, we find the word "Lamb." It reminds us of the Passover lamb and the characteristics of Christ. He was pure; he was innocent. He did not get what he deserved. He got what we deserve.*
- *Finally, as the Scripture tells us, the Christian life comes with tribulation. If they crucified Him, what will they not do to us?*

*Communion is a memorial to the death of Christ. We are often cautioned to*

*remember the body and blood represented here; the body, by the bread and the blood, by the cup. Most of us are familiar with this. But consider also that the very fact that this crucifixion happened means that we are sinners, in need of a Savior. If we were pure and innocent, no such sacrifice would be necessary. But we are not.*

*All this calls for our gratitude, and our praise. Honor your Savior this morning by taking his communion meal in a worthy manner.*

## False Peace

*"I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. "Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

*(Amos 5:21-24 NASB)*

*The Expositor's Bible, in commenting on this passage, refers to a concept which should become familiar to every Christian: "The False Peace of Ritual." There's that sensation that you get when you perform a ritual, and perform it correctly, and conclude that therefore all is well. The ritual serves to reinforce the sense that everything is fine — when it is not. Why is this practice so attractive?*

- *There is the comfort of the familiar. It's like that recliner chair in your living room; it just feels good. But you shouldn't mistake it for exercise.*
- *Ritual is something you can get absolutely right. You cannot live a perfect life but you can perform a perfect ritual. God requires the perfectly right, so ritual feels good.*
- *Sometimes, as C. S. Lewis put it, we just want to "let sleeping worms lie."*
- *Other times, ritual become something that is a good example of groupthink. Everybody else seems happy with it; why shouldn't you be?*

*Of course, God is not seeking the false peace of ritual. He knows we were just going through the motions and when we really mean it. Note that his understanding of our sincerity doesn't depend on whether or not we know we really are sincere. We are good at deluding ourselves. So how do you know the difference?*

- *The sincerely performed ritual results in glory and praise, genuine praise and honor to God. It's not just "something we do."*
- *It also produces godly effects in your life. Here, Amos cites the desire for justice and righteousness. True ritual brings you closer to God, and you should see the results in your life.*

*Therefore, examine yourself this morning. Here are some thoughts for you.*

- *Do you see the body and blood of Christ, or just trays and cups? The people who prepared those trays and cups no doubt did it in a way that honors God in their preparation. Do you honor God in your perception?*
- *Does communion inspire you to set things right with your brother? Act on that inspiration as soon as you can.*
- *Are you driven to sincere prayer instead of simple recital?*

*Do not let the False Peace of Ritual replace true communion with your Lord Jesus Christ.*

## Older Brother

*"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'" (Luke 15:25-32 NASB)*

*The older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son is often thought of as one of the finest instances of a "bad example" in the New Testament. However, like most bad examples, he can always be used for instructional purposes in righteousness. Sometimes bad examples lead to some very good examples, as we shall see.*

*His problem, basically, is one of envy. His kid brother spent all the money on prostitutes and high living while the older brother was righteously working the farm — and that is hard work. He phrases his complaint in terms of justice; it's not fair that the kid brother got what he got. And it's not. The motive behind this is envy — tinged with the suspicion that the older brother would've liked to try those prostitutes also. You cannot help but notice, too, the contempt that he has for the kid brother. But if you're supposed to love your neighbor, wouldn't that include your kid brother?*

*You might think this has nothing to do with us today. May I submit that very often Christians make the mistake of assuming that there are two kinds of people in this world: the righteous and the sinners. When judgment day comes the righteous will line up under a sign (bright neon) labeled "Justice." The sinners will line up under rather beat up old sign that says, "Mercy." The righteous will be richly rewarded; some of the sinners will scrape through into heaven anyway. But some churches today have already anticipated this division. We are willing to put up a Celebrate Recovery program for the sinners, as long as they don't mingle too much with the real saints.*

*But may I point out something? If someone tells you they are a Christian they have just told you that they are also a sinner. They are just as much in need of God's mercy. You see, the most important thing in the story of the Prodigal Son is not the sinfulness of the younger brother nor the righteousness of the older brother. It's the love of the Father. As Paul put it:*

*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. (1 Timothy 1:15 NASB)*

*Communion is the ceremony where we remember the love of the Father expressed at the cross. It is the greatest love that man can have. The cross is the supreme example of such love. Both of these brothers take communion from the same set of trays. And that communion would come from the same source for both of them.*

*So, as you prepare for communion today, looking your heart and see if there is envy of one of your Christian brothers or sisters. If so resolve to clear it so that you may take communion in a worthy manner. Examine yourself, repent as needed and then partake of your Lord's communion.*

## *Nature of Christ*

*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.  
(Hebrews 1:1-4 NASB)*

*The question came naturally to the ancient Hebrew Christian. Just why is this Jesus of Nazareth so special that he is considered to be the sacrifice who takes away our sins? They knew about sacrifice, of course. They had studied the Old Testament Law and naturally wanted to know the connection between that law and Jesus. In this passage, the author — universally supposed to be Paul by the ancient church — explains why Jesus, the Christ, should be so regarded. He answers the question, “What’s so special about Jesus?”*

### **Things visible**

*He begins by pointing out three things that we can observe concerning Christ:*

- *He is the appointed heir of all things. Anything which is matter and energy belongs to Jesus Christ.*
- *He is the agent of creation. That means that when God created the universe, He did it through Jesus. The ancient church had a saying that all good things “came from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit.”*
- *Have you ever wondered why the laws of physics don’t change? It is because Jesus, the Christ, sustains the universe by his power. God does not change; his creation does not change, for Christ sustains it.*

### **Relationship to God**

*Much more than we would understand, the ancient world relied very much on symbols of authority to determine who was to be obeyed. The purple robe was not just a fashion statement but a sign of authority. Authority ultimately comes from God. So we can examine the relationship of Christ to God to see his authority.*

- *He is the radiance of God's glory. If you want to see what is praiseworthy in God the Father, look at the Son. His actions repeat what God is.*
- *He is the perfect imitation of God. You and I do not have the ability to see God directly, but we have the perfect picture in Jesus Christ.*
- *Most telling, he is seated at the right hand of God. Seated, not bowing before him. At the right hand, where the most powerful are placed.*

### ***Relationship to us***

*All of the above is well and good, but the ancient Jew knew that the sacrifice that takes away sin had to be "in the flesh." Angels might deliver the law and prophecy, but sacrifice for sin had to have real flesh. Christ was fully human as well as fully God. He is our sacrifice.*

- *He is the only one who is sinless, and therefore entirely pure. The ancient you would recognize this as an acceptable sacrifice; nothing less would do for the sins of mankind.*
- *Where else besides God which you find love sufficient to go to the Cross? Only the love of God would do that.*
- *To put the point practically, He is the only one who did go to the cross. His death and resurrection were well witnessed.*

*It is altogether fitting, therefore, that we should remember the greatest sacrifice in human history. No one else could have done it. No one else has ever tried. Therefore, as you prepare for communion this morning, think on these things. Remember how great your Lord is and the greatness of his sacrifice for you. To take in a worthy manner you need respect rising to the point of awe. Know who He is; remember who you are.*

## Covenant Ring

*Human beings, when they have something important to say, tend to do so using some sort of symbol. A flag is not just a rectangle of cloth; it is the symbol of a nation. Your reaction to that flag is not determined by what colors it uses, but by the nation it represents.*

*One of the most common forms of symbolic communication arrives in your life at your wedding ceremony. Wedding rings are a symbol of your marriage, and as such perform the function of symbolic communication. They tell everyone else around that you are married; this should also tell them that you are “off-limits.” The wedding rings also remind you of your spouse, and your commitment to him or her. They are a sign of the covenant agreement you accepted at your wedding. A marriage covenant is not the same as a prenuptial contract. The marriage covenant is something God instituted and man uses to set forward the right behavior of both partners in the marriage. At the very least, looking at your wedding rings should inspire a recommitment to marital faithfulness. It reminds you of your obligations, and the benefits thereof.*

*The covenant is the important thing, but note that the covenant being an extremely important one to us we have a symbolic way of communicating it. Really important covenant agreements seem to have a symbol attached to them. There are three examples in the Old Testament:*

- *Noah had a covenant with God in which God promised not to destroy the earth again. The sign of that covenant? The rainbow.*
- *Abraham had a covenant with God which promised him that he would become the father of many nations, and that through him all mankind would be blessed. The sign of that covenant? Circumcision.*
- *Moses accepted the covenant of God on the mountain, and carried the symbol of that covenant back down to the people — the Ten Commandments.*

*The New Testament has its covenant as well. Indeed, the word “Testament” can also be translated “covenant.” The implementation of the new covenant was*

*done at the Lord's Supper, on the night before Christ was crucified. In implementing the Lord's Supper, our Lord said this:*

*And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.*

*(Matthew 26:27-28 NASB)*

*Communion is a reminder. It is a reminder of*

- *What Christ did on the cross for us.*
- *What will happen when He returns.*
- *How we should be obedient in the meanwhile.*

*So, as you partake this morning, remember these things. Contemplate them well. Then partake in a worthy manner, renewing the covenant with your Lord and Savior.*

### *Instructions*

*One of the minor mysteries of life that people encounter is this: how does that guy blow up and make a balloon animal? It's not that hard to do; it just looks that way.*

- *First, get the right kind of balloon. Inflate it to the right length, leaving about 6 inches at the end. It's best if you have a pump to do this; those balloons are very tough to inflate by mouth.*
- *Twist the pieces around in accordance with the set of diagrams you got with the balloons. At first this looks rather complicated but by the time you finish your third one it will be obvious how it's done. The difference between a giraffe and a wiener dog is just the length of the various segments.*
- *Present the result to a child about five years of age and ask them what they think it is. Be prepared for unusual results; your author once made a giraffe which was carefully identified by its recipient as being a swan.*

*By way of comparison, communion comes with instructions too these must be followed to get good results, just like making a balloon animal results from following those instructions.*

- *We are instructed to use the ancient recipe for Passover; bread and wine. Many churches substitute grape juice for wine.*
- *We are to partake in memory of the sacrifice of Christ. We are to remember what this is all about.*
- *As part of this process we are to examine ourselves. We are to seek out that which is sinful and plan for our repentance.*
- *We are to do this with total sincerity — in a “worthy manner.”*

*In so doing you produce a result. That result is a series of proclamations — things you are telling the world to be true to your personal knowledge.*

- *You proclaim the Lord's death — and thus his resurrection and return — when you do this. It is the basic element of the faith. You state that you believe.*
- *You proclaim also the unity of the church, the brotherhood of those who partake with you and believe as you do.*
- *You proclaim this until the Lord comes again — which means you proclaim the second coming of our Lord to judge the living and the dead.*

*As we partake together this morning, follow these instructions. Do so in complete sincerity, remembering that you proclaim the Lord's death, the unity of the church and the judgment of the dead.*

## Garden

*Then Jesus \*came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and \*said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He \*said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:36-39 NASB)*

*We are often encouraged to pray alone and unheard by anyone but God. Other than public prayer in worship, this is considered the best method for Christians. In this particular instance, however, Christ himself chose three of his apostles to accompany him to listen to his prayers. We might well ask why he did this. Dr. Schofield gives us an interesting answer to this question:*

*The value of the account of the agony in the Garden is in the evidence it affords that He knew fully what the agony of the cross would mean when His soul was made an offering for sin, ([Isa 53:10](#)); in the hiding of the Father's face. Knowing the cost to the utmost, he voluntarily paid it.*

*Christ knew the agony to come and voluntarily accepted it. We, being sinful human beings, cannot possibly know the extent of this agony. It is beyond any possible experience we have. But we can know that he experienced it.*

*Christ established in his apostles a memory that night. As communion is a time for us to remember, we might look at what Christ instilled in them.*

- *That night was a night of very human agony. There is no thought here of Jesus being God and therefore exempt from fear and pain. He was fully human; he fully experienced the agony.*
- *They saw the fear; they also saw the love which triumphed over that fear.*
- *From the first days of the church, they knew and preached that this agony brought about salvation which is personal to each and everyone who accepts it.*

*Communion is a time for prayer; we might learn a good lesson here from Christ's prayer taken as a model for our own.*

- *First, acknowledge the sovereignty of God. You are not bargaining with an equal, but the Lord of the universe. Render the respect deserved.*

- *Second, before you make your requests, acknowledge that you will accept God's will as the answer to your plea. Make it clear that you are obedient to his will.*
- *Then, ask the Sovereign God if he would see if it would be possible to grant your request.*

*The agony of Christ on the cross opened the door for you to bring your requests to the Lord of the universe in heaven. Do so thoughtfully and respectfully, as a sinner boldly approaching the throne of grace.*

## Repetition

*It is a lesson that grandparents learn very quickly. If you going to read a favorite story book to your grandchild, you had best get every single word exactly right. If you don't — and you can count on this — your grandchild will correct you quite sternly. Whether you pronounce the word wrong, substitute another word or just simply omit the word, you will hear about it. Your grandchild wants to hear the "right" version of the story — just as written. It's entirely possible if you keep insisting on substituting words that you may not get asked to read the story again. To a little child, these things are important.*

*St. Paul understood the principal as well. Notice how he describes his understanding of communion:*

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; (1 Corinthians 11:23 NASB)*

*The principle is simple: getting it right means matching the original. He understood that it was important that he did not modify what Christ instituted, but rather repeat it. So we might ask, repeat what?*

- *First, that the bread broken in communion represents in some way the body of Jesus Christ, broken on the cross for our sins. We are to do this in remembrance of Christ.*
- *Second, that the cup taken represents his blood in some way, shed for our sins. We are to do this in remembrance of Christ.*
- *As we do these things, we should consciously be aware that we are proclaiming the death of Christ for our sins — the atonement. By implication, we also proclaim his return.*

*So how does one get this right? May I suggest three things.*

- *Proclaim what you believe. Let your participation in communion be driven by the fact that you are telling the world this is what you believe. You believe in the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. By taking communion you tell the world this is what you believe.*

- *Believe what you proclaim. Examine yourself and see if you in fact do really believe. Consider the implications in your life; does the sacrifice of Christ change who you are? It should.*
- *Live like it during the week. As you go throughout your ordinary week, remember that you are an ambassador for Christ who this very day told the world that you believe. Show the world you mean it.*

## Rites

*Practically all churches, and all denominations, have a series of formal ceremonies called Rites. Let me spell that for you: R ● I ● T ● E ● S. It's not the same word as "rights" or "writes." The number of such ceremonies varies by the church or denomination, but two that are almost universally recognized are baptism and communion. Such a ceremony is usually associated with something of great importance in the church. Baptism is associated with entry into the church; communion celebrates the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.*

*What you might not have noticed about these two ceremonies, in particular communion, is that there is no distinction between the sexes in either of these. It's the same communion for male as it is for female. This may seem obvious, but in the early church they looked to the Old Testament law in which there was plenty of such distinction. The entry ritual was circumcision! Communion is a good example Paul's statement:*

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.  
(Galatians 3:28 NASB)*

*We recognize that male and female are not necessarily interchangeable parts. So in what way do we recognize this equality in communion?*

- *Men and women are equally the object of divine love. That love is infinite; that which is infinite has no degrees.*
- *They have the same spiritual privileges. Both are indwelt by the Holy Spirit; both share the same Lord, the same faith and the same baptism. They are part of one family — the family of God.*
- *All of us are in service to the same Lord, and are obedient to him. The blessings of obedience are not reserved for one sex.*
- *We all hold to the same hopes and expectations — the return of our Lord, the judgment to come in the new Heaven and new Earth.*

*So how should the child of God react to this?*

- *Take it seriously. Look at this not just as an empty ritual but a recognition who you really are, eternally.*
- *Rejoice in your salvation! Don't take it for granted.*
- *Remember — you are a child of God. Communion is a reminder of that. So during the week, act like a child of God – love one another.*

### *Pause*

*One of the changes in the church in the last few years has been a shift to a more upbeat, up-tempo worship style. Where in the past we had solemnity throughout the service, it now seems that only communion is a solemn event. It's as if you're playing an action movie on your TV, and somebody hits the pause button. Suddenly, everything stops. May I suggest that we pause — and look.*

### **Look back**

*We may begin by looking backwards, into history. Among the many possible things we could look at, these three are of first importance:*

- *God Almighty came into our world, as a baby, in the flesh. CS Lewis called the Incarnation “the supreme miracle.” God himself walked among us on feet like ours.*
- *He did not come just to say some fine things. He came to be the Atonement for our sins. His death on the cross paid the price to reconcile us and grant us forgiveness and eternal life.*
- *Finally, his resurrection from the grave assures us that he has conquered death — and that his promises of eternal life are therefore sure.*

### **Look around**

*We must also look at the present. What do we see as we take communion?*

- *First, we see the unity of the church. All those who claim the name of Christ are taking of the same cup and the same loaf. We are one.*
- *That church is united in its loyalty to its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The church is composed of those who are obedient to the commands of Christ, and that church proclaims its unity in communion.*
- *To maintain our relationship with Christ, and thus maintain our unity, we take the time to examine ourselves, and repent.*

### **Look forward**

*We should also look forward. What has our Lord told us will occur? There are many things that are prophesied, and many schemes of prophecy to interpret them. But these are the great certainties of the future:*

- *The dead shall rise to face judgment. Do you think Adolf Hitler got what he deserved? Neither do I. But God isn't finished with him yet, nor the rest of humanity.*
- *The dead in Christ will rise with a body which is incorruptible — and eternal body designed for an eternity with Christ. "Joy unspeakable, the half has never yet been told."*
- *Eternal life is promised to us — not an eternal life of drudgery and pain but one in which the ultimate enemy of the human race, death, has been conquered and joy reigns.*

*All this will come about because of the act of love of our Savior. He came in the flesh and died as our atonement. In communion we proclaim our loyalty to him. We also proclaim our belief in his return. Even so, Lord, come soon.*

## Storybook

*One of the aspects of growing more mature is that you begin to see things in stories that resemble some sort of lesson. Stories are used to teach us about many things. A good story has a beginning, in which we introduce the main characters and the main problem. It has a middle in which that problem is dealt with. Then it has an ending which, we hope, says “and they lived happily ever after.”*

*The Bible is organized somewhat like this. It has a beginning in the Old Testament. The main character is God, who is introduced on page 1. A couple pages later we are introduced to the main problem: sin. We are also introduced to a parade of characters who struggle with the main problem. This includes the prophets, like Moses and Elijah, priests, and kings like David. When we get to the end of the beginning we know what the central problem of mankind is: we are sinners. From what we know in the Old Testament we can treat the problem, but not cure it.*

*The middle in the story is found in the New Testament. God, the central character in the beginning, becomes a man like us — Jesus, the Christ. He is the one who actually deals with the main problem, bringing it to solution. He gives us great teaching, but his main purpose is the atonement. By this he pays for our sins, giving us the cure for the problem. He leaves with us the Holy Spirit so that we can continue with the solution.*

*The ending? It hasn't been written yet, only hinted at in the prophetic writings. We know that involves the return of the King of Kings. He will return, and the great day of judgment will happen. After that? There are a lot of theories, but we can say that the final answer is that all of his children live happily ever after.*

*Communion reminds us of this great story. It reflects God's character to us, showing his great love and mercy in parallel with his righteousness. Sin had to be paid for with an acceptable sacrifice; in his love he provided it; in his righteousness he accepted it. Communion brings to our mind the atonement of Christ; his body represented in the bread, his blood in the cup. So it is that we*

*have our salvation symbolized to us. But remember that communion is to be taken until He returns. Thus communion is also a symbol to us of our ultimate destination: heaven, also known as "happily ever after." As you partake, think on these things and reflect upon what God has done for you.*

**October 10**

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## *True Church*

*One of the earliest English language Bibles is known as the Geneva Bible. It was first printed more than 50 years before the original King James Version was produced. In 1560 it was introduced to the world. It was named after the city of Geneva which at the time was one of the very few places where a Protestant could be safe from being burned at the stake. It was the first English Bible to have chapter and verse numbers. It was also the original study Bible, as it had extensive notes included.*

*This meditation is taken from one of those notes. The note relates to Acts 2:42:*

*And they continued in the Apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and prayers. (Acts 2:42 Geneva)*

*The footnote for this verse reads:*

*“The marks of the true Church are the doctrine of the apostles, the duties of charity, the pure and simple administration of the ordinances, and the true invocation used by all of the faithful.”*

*It's a pretty good description of what the true church should look like. What may seem funny to you is that they include communion (“ordinances”) done correctly as one of these essentials. After all, it's easy to understand following the apostles doctrine. The truth is the truth and you should follow it. The duties of charity our way of showing our fellowship with each other (see John 13:35). And as children of God we should be expected to be in constant conversation with our Heavenly Father.*

*But communion sometimes provokes the response of, “it's just a ritual.” We need to understand the significance of rituals.*

*First, rituals are important. If you don't think so, think back to your wedding. Did you just go down to the county clerk's office and casually get married? Or did you spend a lot of time, money and effort doing it in a church? Was it important?*

*Second, we insist on the accuracy of our rituals. We have to do it the right way. Think of it this way: if somebody in a local school district decided to “revise” the Pledge of Allegiance, the national anthem or some other ceremony about which we have strong thoughts, do you think there would be a fuss? Of course there would be — we want our rituals to be done right. That’s normal human behavior.*

*Why? Because rituals say something important, often something that cannot really be expressed in words. So what does communion say that is so hard to express in words?*

- *It tells the world that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Jesus, the Christ, the incarnation of the living God. He is human like us, but he is also God.*
- *It clearly proclaims the death (and thus the atonement), burial and resurrection of Jesus. No one else ever has told us he would walk out of the grave — and then did it.*
- *It also marks the fact that Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead.*

*If these were not sufficient, one other thing that taking communion proclaims: your faith. It doesn’t just tell the world these things about Christ; it tells the world that you follow Christ and believe these things.*

## Accursed

*If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23 NASB)*

*It seems a bit strange to those who are knowledgeable in biblical matters to talk of hanging as a form of execution. Indeed, the Jews did not hang anyone to kill them; rather, they hung them after they had been stoned to death as a form of public shaming. For most of human history executions have been a very public spectacle, often a form of entertainment at the expense of the criminal being executed. Many pirates, for example, were executed by hanging and then their bodies were left to rot inside an iron bar cage. Some stayed up for years. But the Scriptures put a limit to such vengeance: to leave the body up after sundown was to defile the land.*

*Note, please, that the one who was hung this way was accursed by God. This would've been viewed by the people of this time as one of the most serious things that could possibly happen to you eternally. If God curses you, you are genuinely accursed.*

*This would be a minor footnote in the Old Testament except that it is explicitly stated that this passage applies to Jesus Christ on the Cross. Think what that means.*

- *It means he bore the guilt of our sins — and therefore was accursed on our behalf. Our problem; he fixed it.*
- *It means that he bore the shame of our sins — the things that we do after dark, in hidden places because we didn't want anyone else to find out, were part of his burden.*
- *It means that his enemies certainly recognized the passage as being applicable and were insistent on getting them underground that same day. He was dead and buried — and he was our atonement.*

*All this he did out of his great love for you and me.*

*In communion, he asks us to remember him. Look back on his death now:*

- *It was a painful death, the most painful form of death the people of that time knew how to inflict.*
- *It was a lonesome death, so lonesome that he cried out to God asking why he had been forsaken. In the midst of a crowd, Jesus died alone.*
- *It was a shameful death; the other two men crucified with him were criminals. He was identified in death as being one like them.*

*All this he endured for you and for me, out of his great love. As you partake of the cup and the bread today, remember what he endured for your sake.*

## *Sand Dunes*

*Just north of Vandenberg Air Force Base and south of Pismo Beach lies the small farming town of Nipomo. Nothing much happens in Nipomo. The vegetables grow at a steady rate and offer little in the way of surprise. On the seaward edge of town there is a little nature preserve, the Gonzalez-Nipomo Dunes. In 2012 the unexpected happened there. An archaeologist was called in to evaluate the matter. Archaeologist? What do you need an archaeologist for in a sand dune? The fragments of the item in question when pieced together revealed a most unusual object.*

*A sphinx.*

*You might expect to see such a thing in Egypt in a sand dune. It's possible you might find one somewhere else in the Middle East. But this is California, the West Coast of North America. How did you ever get a sphinx there in the first place?*

*The answer is relatively simple. Between 1923 in 1925, Cecil B. DeMille filmed the most expensive silent film ever made: Ben Hur. As the costs skyrocketed, the production was moved from Egypt and Rome back to the studios in California. It was the closest sand dune to Hollywood. The statuary had remained hidden in the sands for 90 years.*

*The object is interesting because it is so unexpected. If it had been a car from the 1920s it might've made it to a museum, but no great curiosity would be aroused. A sphinx, on the other hand, demands an explanation.*

*May I submit that in a sense communion requires the same explanation. If we were required to create a memorial to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we would start with a band full of guitars and drums. But what do we see? We see something that seems out of place in modern worship.*

- *We see flatbread given to represent his body, in a time where sliced bread is quite common.*
- *We see grape juice/wine, a form of liquid color, to remind us of his shed blood.*

*The explanation is simple, of course. This is what they had back when this was instituted. We do it to remember his body and blood being sacrificed. The entire ritual is given to us so that we might also remember his bodily resurrection from the dead. It also reminds us of his promise to return, to judge the living and the dead.*

*Perhaps our sense of wonder is dulled by the frequency with which we take it. Prior generations considered it much more sacred than some people do today. Consider the question: why do we do this? Why is this ritual here? It commemorates the greatest event in human history. Look at it as if it were coming out of the sands of time, on display for the first time. Perhaps that is the awe we need to experience to truly understand why Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."*

## *Tools and Times*

*As you get older, there is a subtle change that takes place in the way you view things. You are much more likely to reach for your glasses when you're older. It brings to mind the two requirements for serious observation:*

- *You have to be in the right place at the right time. If you want to watch your children play high school football, you have to be in the bleachers.*
- *You have to have the right tools. If the bleachers contain a lot of people you might want to bring along a pair of binoculars.*

*This applies to scientific observation as well. If you want to study the stars you going to need a telescope. You probably want to do it at night, too. Similarly, if you want to look at bacteria, you'll need a microscope — and an appropriate collection of pond scum.*

*But what if you want to see God? What's the right place for doing that? I submit to you that communion is a very excellent place to start. For our Lord himself said:*

*While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."  
(Matthew 26:26-28 NASB)*

*Taken literally, this poses some problems for us. However, our Lord also told us what the right instrument for seeing God might happen to be:*

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."  
(Matthew 5:8 NASB)*

*So then, the right tool is the pure heart and the right place is communion. Communion is something you have before you; how do you get the pure heart? We are given this instruction as well:*

*But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

*(1 Corinthians 11:28 NASB)*

*How do you do this? The process of self-examination begins with honesty towards yourself. Examine yourself for errors and omissions, faults and bad habits. Then, repent. Resolve to follow through on your repentance after you leave the building this morning. Do this with a sincere heart. Then partake.*

*As you do, the bread becomes the body of Christ, on the cross for you for your forgiveness. The cup becomes his blood, shed for the remission of sin. Examine these things with the heart purified and the mind seeking for the one true God. Open the eyes of your heart, and see.*

## Cuckoo Clock

*Despite the fact that the technology of making clocks has moved on past the old-fashioned cuckoo clock, many homes still have one. They are rather decorative, and more than that they provide a sense of comfort. The device is rhythmic, and therefore its sound is quite predictable. The sound itself is not too loud, but it's sharp enough to be present constantly. It is completely predictable and therefore comfortable. Once an hour, a wooden cuckoo emerges and tells you the time. It is a nice background sound. It is so soothing, in fact, that most of us can sleep through it. The cuckoo clock still runs in the middle of the night — and most of us think that sound means all is well. It is a comfortable sound.*

*It should be noted, however, that this effect is not without its work. Depending on the clock type, the weights need to be hoisted back up either once a day or once a week. If you don't do this, the clock stops.*

*In a way, Communion is like that cuckoo clock. It's a rhythmic activity; we do it once a week, or once a month or on some other schedule. But it's predictable; we therefore get used to it. It's not particularly disturbing. Communion meditations like this one tend to be low key, not thunder from the pulpit. It's not too disturbing but rather routine and predictable. Most of us can't sleep through it — but we can sleepwalk through it.*

*You see, communion has an equivalent to hoisting those weights. It's called self-examination. If you're not willing to do this, communion will quickly lose its comforting effect. So how does someone examine himself for communion? Here are some thoughts on that:*

- *Are you constantly in conflict with other people? Is it just possible that the source of the conflict might not be entirely their fault?*
- *Is there something in your life that you keep so secret that you would never disclose it to others? Did you think that God does not know about it? Take it to Him in prayer to work out your repentance.*
- *Is your prayer life stunted and withering? Who moved — you or God?*

*The comfort of forgiveness, the assurance of heaven and the promise of his great return are all implied in communion. Self-examination and repentance keep it that way. Examine, repent — repeat.*

## *Under His Wings*

### *Psalm 91:1-8*

*This is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms:*

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.*

*(Psalms 91:1-8 ESV)*

*As we shall see, this Psalm describes God as well as us. We shall see that communion reminds us of many things about God and us.*

### **About God**

*Perhaps the most comforting thing that comes out of this Psalm is the idea that God is a fortress and a refuge, a strong hiding place to which we can run. The wicked are not content with physical assault, but must also assault us psychologically and spiritually. When that happens — and it will — we run to God to be our fortress. Not only will he be our fortress, he will deliver us from the attack of the evil one. God, if you will, takes sides. His forgiving children are important to him and he defends them from Satan's attack.*

*It's important to know how he does this — by overshadowing. One of the things of the Christian apologist must learn very early is to turn the attack on him personally into an attack on God. Anyone can quite successfully accuse me of being a sinner; I'm a Christian, after all. By definition Christians are all sinners. Far more important than that, however, is God's reaction to our sins. He overshadows them; by his sacrifice we are cleansed.*

## **About us**

*It's important to remember that when you become a Christian you become a child of God. You are his adopted heir, brought into his family. This world is not my home, and I'm very glad I travel through this world with the other children of God in his church. When you pay attention to what God says, you will see that the timid become fearless. That's not the same as being bold or irrational; not all of us are cosmic leaders. But all of us can feel the peace that true fearlessness brings. The threat is very great; God is greater.*

*The great promise given to us is that we shall see the recompense of the wicked. The day of judgment is coming; the evil will appear before the great throne of judgment and we shall see it. Do you think Adolf Hitler got everything he deserved in this life? I don't think so either — but God isn't done with him yet.*

## **Communion**

*Communion is a reminder of these things. The bread and the cup remind us of his atoning sacrifice, by which we are adopted and forgiven. The guilt of our lives is wiped away, and our accuser is silenced. This is just the beginning. We are in a contest between good and evil. By his atoning sacrifice and God's eternal plan, we shall see the end of that contest. The good guys win.*

*Communion is the reminder that says the victory has already been won. By Christ's body and blood we are forgiven and adopted. We are given the promise that the good guys win and we shall see it with our own eyes. Soon, please Lord, soon.*

## Participation

Perhaps it never occurred you to wonder about this. Jesus left a fair amount of instruction to his disciples to be implemented after the resurrection and the ascension, but he made it a point to explicitly be a part of the first communion — the initial Lord's Supper. Did you ever wonder why?

- *Much of Jesus' life was exemplary. It is to say that he said an example for us, one which we can extend. The implementation of the Lord's supper was so important that he did it by example for us. This tends to prevent things from becoming much too formal and complicated; it was a simple meal, done in a simple manner and therefore something that can be easily imitated.*
- *Throughout most of human history our societies have been organized in a hierarchical fashion. The hierarchy in question is usually hereditary, whether that be dukes, earls, princes and kings or just the rich and socially prominent. As Chrysostom suggested concerning baptism, some of the top echelons of society might decide that they are too good to take communion. After all, communion involves self-examination and repentance — and that's just for the sinner types. But if the Lord of the universe, the King of Kings himself participates, who among us is so high and mighty as to refuse?*
- *Note, please, that Christ deliberately took the step of instituting the Lord's Supper before the crucifixion. This makes it a form of prophecy; in his time prophecy about the crucifixion. But since then it has served as prophecy for his return, as he said he would not eat and drink this meal again until he came back. From this we remember that communion prophesies to us the return of Christ and the judgment to come.*

*By the fact that Jesus implemented communion himself, before the crucifixion, we see before us an example of how it should be done. We see that all of us should participate, as the church is one body. We also acknowledge that we do this until he returns to judge the living and the dead. So as you partake this morning, remember that the bread represents his body broken for you. The cup represents his blood, shed for you and the remission of your sins. Therefore, prepare your mind by self-examination so that you might take communion in a humble and worthy manner, aware of your own failings. Then perceive the body and blood of Christ before you, as you partake.*

## *Egypt*

*It sometimes escapes the notice of the average Christian that the Lord's Supper is based upon the Jewish festival of Passover. We tend to look at it and see the same menu, but not much else. The fact is that Christ deliberately used Passover to institute communion because of the significance they share.*

- *The first thing they share is slavery. The Jews were slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians; we were slaves to sin. Communion in Passover are both about escaping from that slavery.*
- *It's worth noting that all of us are slaves; the escape — "The Exodus" — is offered to all. Moses did not take time to determine which Jews were worthy and which ones were not. Christ has no criterion set out for who is a "worthy sinner."*
- *To this day, the modern Jew acknowledges his identification with the Exodus. The passages recited are in the present tense, and personal. In communion we remember Christ's suffering — and apply it to ourselves.*
- *Both ceremonies have a prophetic forward look. Passover looks forward to the coming of the Messiah; communion looks forward to his return.*
- *Both ceremonies were attested to by God. Moses had his 10 plagues; Christ, the resurrection. Both show the unmistakable hand of God in the affairs of men.*

*We might add to this that our escape is not just from an abstract called "sin." It is also our escape from the control of Satan, just as the ancient Jews escaped Egypt and their control by Pharaoh. We escape from a system, but we also escape from an individual.*

*How closely these two are connected may be seen at the Transfiguration. Consider this passage from Luke, chapter 9:*

***And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.***

***(Luke 9:30-31 NASB)***

*The word translated as "departure" is, in the Greek, "exodos."*

*Of course, our salvation does not come without cost. It's just that we couldn't pay the cost — so He did. By his body and his blood he purchased our salvation. But it is up to us to participate in the Exodus. We need to leave Satan and sin behind. Therefore examine yourself this morning.*

*Let's end with some good news. The departure means nothing if there is not a destination. The Jew had a destination: The Promised Land. We have a destination too. More than that, we have the path marked out for us. Christ told us that he is the way — and without the way, there is no going. Leave the world of sin, follow Christ who is the way and depart to the Promised Land.*

## *Do Me a Favor*

*One of the curious things found in the New Testament is the story of Joseph of Arimathea. He figures in only one incident, the burial of Jesus, but the account of his help is found in all four Gospels. That's a relatively rare event. From Matthew we learn that Joseph was rich and a disciple of Jesus. Mark tells us he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Luke tells us he was a member of the ruling Council, who objected to their plans to crucify Christ. John relates the basic story, along with the assistance that Nicodemus gave in bringing spices. These might seem like minor details, but I believe the authors of the Gospels were impressed with one thing about Joseph of Arimathea: he did Jesus a favor that by all rational thought could never be repaid. Jesus was dead; how can he return the favor that Joseph did him? That is a high degree of charity.*

*Let's examine that concept — "a favor that can't be returned." What kinds of favors cannot be returned?*

- *Sometimes it's a matter of authority. Most of us have had the experience of trying to get something done at City Hall. It helps to have someone who is "in the system" who knows where to go and who to talk to. If he's willing to use his influence it helps all the more.*
- *Often it's a case of not having the power to do something. This can be something as simple as opening a jar for your grandmother. Sometimes you just don't have the strength or power to do something, and you need a little help.*
- *Occasionally it comes down to this: you know what you want, you know where to get it — and you don't have the money. If you can't pay the price, you need the favor.*

*Have you ever considered communion to be the marker of the favor which you cannot repay? It is very much that.*

- *We need our sins forgiven. But do we have the authority to do that? We can forgive those who have sinned against us, but our own sins are beyond our authority. Christ is not so restricted (see Matthew 28:18). He has his divine authority to forgive our sins.*
- *Where does this power to forgive sins come from, if not divine love? Our love for each other is imperfect and therefore weak. His love for us is perfect and therefore powerful.*
- *As for payment, none would do except the sinless blood of Jesus of Nazareth. We have no such purity; anything we offer would be unacceptable. But Jesus paid it all.*

*We are rather in the position of the guests at the banquet described in Luke 14:12-14.*

*And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

*(Luke 14:12-14 NASB)*

*We are the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. We have been invited to our Master's table, to remember his sacrifice on our behalf. It is the ultimate favor done to mankind.*

## *Exit Strategy - or, How to Leave Communion*

*Luke 7:36-50*

*Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

*(Luke 7:36-50 NASB)*

*Perhaps this seems rather a long passage for a short communion meditation. We will be focusing on the last three verses. In particular we will look at how Christ spoke to the woman as she left the banquet.*

### ***"Your sins have been forgiven"***

*The first thing I would have you notice is the use of the past tense. Christ does not waive his hands over her in some magic gesture to forgive her sins; he simply announces to her that they have been forgiven. Her forgiveness relies not on some gesture but upon the character of God. You will recall how the prodigal son was welcomed home; it's the only time in Scripture where God is pictured as running. The repentant sinner is always His welcome guest.*

*Next, please note that he says "your sins have been forgiven. Considering that the lady in question was a prostitute, it seems that God's forgiveness covers a broad range of sins. We sometimes think that he only forgives the socially unacceptable sins. Prostitution, as of late, has become more and more approved by our society. It is still sin and can be forgiven. Even the socially acceptable ones can be forgiven — if you will ask.*

### ***"Your faith has saved you"***

*(Christ uses this phrase on several occasions, particularly when healing the sick. We will, therefore, omit the debate on faith and works for lack of space.)*

*The righteous shall live by faith, the Scripture tells us. But even the unrighteous can have faith, grasping it as their path to Christ. The key thing here is not some intellectual subscription to a particular belief system, it is the personal devotion to Jesus Christ. Faith means believing in Christ — and this lady did. Faith is not a "what"; it is a "who."*

*Of course, if you have faith it will show. It will be demonstrated in your actions, whether routine or spectacular. This woman demonstrates her faith by bringing the best she has to the one she loves.*

***“Go in peace”***

*So we come to the question of how you leave Communion. After you have partaken; after you have come with reverent spirit and humble heart to the throne of grace, after your confession and forgiveness, how do you leave?*

- *First, have no doubt whatsoever that you are forgiven. Almighty God is the only one who has the authority to forgive any and all sins. If he has forgiven you, you are forgiven indeed.*
- *As Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-2, you have been justified by faith, and therefore you have peace with God.*
- *As you go, remember that the first duty of a Christian is the imitation of Christ. He received a woman whose sins were socially unacceptable, an outcast of society. She was a person with whom good people would not dirty their hands. Yet Christ welcomed her to the family of God. Go, and do likewise.*

## Chains

The study of individual English words in the Bible can yield some interesting results. Take, for example, the word “chains.” Search through the Bible and you will find two different uses for what apparently is pretty much the same thing. The first is a noble word which is a sign of being blessed.

- Chains were worn in ancient times as jewelry. We continue this practice today; some people refer to it as “bling” in our culture. In other cultures such change or a way of saving wealth more than demonstrating it. It was common in ancient times, even to the point that we know that some camels were decorated with chains.
- In a more religious context, we also find that the breastplate of the High Priest had gold chains on it. This is what God told Moses to do.
- Perhaps the highest use of chains in the Old Testament comes in the construction of the Temple. Solomon directed that gold chains be made for use as room markers, dividing one section of the temple from another.

So we can see that chains can be taken in a very positive sense. But of course there is an opposite use as well.

- The most obvious use is that of restraints. Chains in this time period were used to restrain the person to a particular place, usually a dungeon. Prison systems even to this day use chains on particularly dangerous prisoners.
- Perhaps you hadn’t thought of it this way, but chains are also used as a visible sign. They tell you who the police department thinks is the perpetrator. Indeed, we sometimes speak of the “perp walk” by which the suspect is shamed in front of news cameras. It’s just not physical restraint; it’s psychological damage too.

That last point is important to us as Christians. It is not sufficient to state that Christ went to the cross. We must add to this the fact that he was taken to the cross in the most humiliating and disgraceful manner known to the time. Beatings, floggings, carrying the cross itself and being nailed to that would all were intended to denote shame. But is the author of Hebrews puts it (Hebrews 12:2)

**“...or the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...”**

Our Lord went to the cross despite the shame of it, because of God’s great love for his children on earth. In communion we remember that sacrifice, including the shame. The cup represents his blood, shed for our sins. The bread represents his body. In this simple ceremony we remember the sacrifice of Christ — body, blood and shame. Do so with honesty, humility and admiration.

## Day after Christmas

One of the Christmas carols for which Christians don’t normally memorize all the verses is “Good King Wenceslaus.” For those who are not raised in a liturgical church, this carol can get confusing in its first two lines:

Good King Wenceslaus looked out

on the Feast of Stephen

*It's tough enough to know who Wenceslaus was — a king in Bavaria in the 10<sup>th</sup> century — but, "Feast of Stephen?" Who is this Stephen?*

*Actually, it's likely enough that you do know who this Stephen is. His story can be found in the sixth and seventh chapters of the Book of Acts. You will recall that he was selected, along with six others, to handle waiting on tables for various widows. Of course, he was the first Christian martyr as well. It turns out that when the church began assigning feast days for various saints, they selected December 26 for Stephen. The reasoning is that he was the first martyr, so they decided to place him on the first feast day after the birthday of Christ. Ever since, December 26 has been the "Feast of Stephen."*

*It is fitting, therefore, that we examine Stephen as an example for the rest of us.*

- *The Scripture tells us that he was "full of the Holy Spirit." One of the reasons we take communion is to renew the Holy Spirit within us.*
- *He was a man who had a ready defense of the faith, able to defend what he believed in plain language.*
- *In sublime imitation of his Lord and Master, he died asking God to "not hold this against them." He was a model of forgiveness.*

*One of the things about being the example is this: you never know who's watching. In this case it was a young man named Saul, better known to you as Paul, the apostle.*

*Christmas celebrates the incarnation of Christ; his coming in the flesh. He came for a purpose; that purpose was to die for our sins so that we might have salvation. Christ instituted communion so that we might remember that sacrifice being close fellowship with Him. As He died, his disciples followed willingly. All but one of the apostles died a martyr's death. So, as we partake of communion this morning, let us examine ourselves and see how close we are to our Lord, and how willing we are to follow his example. The bread his body; the cup his blood; let us now examine ourselves and see just how close we are to our Lord.*