

Lord's Supper

edited and compiled by from the writing of J. B. Watson

"This do in remembrance of me." Wherever, throughout all the world, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached, and men and women have come to a knowledge of Christ, groups of saved people will be found gathered together that they might observe the direction of those words: *"This do in remembrance of me."* If a first century Christian could be transported through all the centuries, and set down here in our twentieth century as an observer in some of those gatherings, he would not be able in many of them to discern a single feature that had survived since the first century. So overlaid with human traditions and with priestly assumptions, with alterations of this sort and that, with additions, has the original ordinance become that, sad to say, this would be true. But still, it may be held that even now, in this late hour of our dispensation, such an observer could happen upon companies of people who upon the first day of the week observe this ordinance in a way very similar to that away back in New Testament days. First Corinthians eleven gives the divine warrant for the service of the Lord's supper, and in chapter twenty of Acts we have a New Testament example of a local church meeting together to remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread. There is surviving to our day a letter from the second century written by Justin Martyr, in which he give details for the breaking of bread which differ very little from the New Testament Scriptures. He says, *"We all hold this united assembly on Sunday, because that is the first day of the week, in which God turned aside darkness and matter, and made the world, and because Jesus Christ our Savior on that day rose from the dead."* Later in the letter he says: *"On the day called Sunday there is an assembly in one place of all the Christians who dwell in the cities or in the country, and the memorials of the apostles or the writings of the prophets, are read as time may permit."* (Justin Martyr, Apology I, trans. L.W. Bernard,(Cambridge, 1967, p. 61) So that when they came together in the second century they did it on the first day of the week, they came together for the purpose of breaking bread, and they took opportunity in their gathering to minister the Word of God. Now imagine yourself one only yesterday born again, knowing scarcely any thing of Christian doctrine or practice, just as they were in the city of Corinth. Suppose you were to visit such a company of Christians on the first day of the week, and finds them sat down around a simply-spread table which bears two simple emblems—bread and wine. As the service proceeds, the question arises in your mind; why do they do this? If you were to ask a believer after the service, they might say something like this: "Why, we do it because our blessed Lord asked us to do it. On that very night when His heart was as full of sorrow as it was of love, He looked into the faces of His own that were clustered around Him and said to them with longing in his heart: *'This do in remembrance of me.'*" We do it because he asked us to do it. This is really , the fundamental answer. You may read tome a foot thick on the Lord's supper and you will never get beyond this truth. Wonderful it is, after all that the learned men say, to discover that this is still the very heart of the matter.

Lord's Supper as a Memorial Feast

Now there are other reasons for why we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is a memorial feast. When we come together around the Lord's Table, we come having Himself before our thoughts. At the supper we turn aside for a time from the demands of business life, and family life and turn our inward gaze upon Christ alone. A hundred and one lawful things fill our thought at other hours, but when we take our place at the Lord's Table we empty our hands and minds of all of these, and Christ fills our memory. At the Lord's Table memory functions at its very highest level, for there it occupies itself with our Master and Lord. At the Lord's Table the Holy Spirit is the King's Remembrancer indeed, for He brings the Lord before our souls in all His glory and fullness from eternal glory to Bethlehem to Calvary and back to His throne in heaven. At the Lord's Table every eye is fasted on Him. It is a memorial feast. There is still more to the memorial feast. The Lord's Supper is the Lord's divine method to drive us back week by week to the center and heart of our faith: Christ. The Lord who knows our needs more than we know ourselves, saw how needful it was to bring us back to the very heart, core and foundation of our faith, again and again. Sunday by Sunday our hearts are set aflame anew by the mighty mystery of Calvary. The world is so full of many voices that might well drive us away the true center of things, but not many days will pass till the Lord's day comes anew and we fulfill his wish, and memory and mind and thoughts and affection are all brought back face to face with the infinite wonder of Calvary's most bitter cross.

Corporate Proclamation of the Lord's Death

The Lord's supper is an announcement, a proclamation, corporate preaching of the Lord's death. I have heard Christians say: "I can remember the Lord without any rite or ceremony." I have heard Christians who neglect the Lord's Table excuse themselves by saying they remember the Lord every day. I hope they do. I am sorry for any Christian who does not. However, the Lord's supper is so central to the purposes of God that He has decreed and ordained both that in the dispensation before it occurred and in the dispensation since it occurred, there should be in the world by His people a corporate recognition and proclamation of that mighty event. In Israel year by year, the Paschal feast pointed to the Calvary that was yet to be, and in the Church for more than twenty centuries, the Lord's Supper has pointed to Calvary. The church corporate shows forth the Lord's death—the most important event couched between two eternities. The Lord's death; the death that annulled death. The death that drew the sting of death. The one death, since death entered, that was completely voluntary, but also the only death that has every been undertaken by divine authorization. The death which is life to those believe on Him. Let no man say that he can neglect the Lord's command: "*This do*". For it is an ugly temper in a man's soul when he assumes to be able to get on without something that the Lord has deemed necessary. It is also a confession of our hope. "*You do show the Lord's death —until he come.*" You say: "What is it all about, the death that abolished death? You Christians are no different from other people. You still have to attend funerals." But when we are gathered together around the Lord's table, we are saying wait. We are waiting. The first installment of victory over death is already in glory. We are waiting for the trumpet sound and he ancient graves are stirred by his command, and we meet together in the air, to be forever with the Lord. We are saying with one voice, we are saying to an unbelieving world, we are saying to hostile spiritual powers, we are saying to the reinforcing of each others faith, we are saying to the pleasure of our God and Father: "*We do this till He come.*"

Divine Blueprint for Participation at the Lord Supper

How should we observe the Lord's supper? At the very birth of the Church, back in the beginning of the book of Acts, the Bible says they "*broke bread*". They continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine, in breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). In the twentieth chapter of the Acts, it says: "*And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them at Troas in five days, where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread Paul preached unto them*" (Acts 20:6-7). I want you to notice that, in order to be present when the disciples came together Paul waited full seven days in Troas. He apparently arrived there on what we would call a Monday morning, and consequently, in order that he should meet all the saints when they came together as was their custom on the first day of the week, he tarried seven days at Troas. When you come together as an assembly, that is, when Christians meet in the capacity of a church, you come together as such on the first day of the week primarily to remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread. They came together as a local church that was formed by the Holy Spirit, to be a witness for Christ in that locality. But that is not all. "*The cup of blessing which we bless is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not communion of the body of Christ?*" The prayer over which we pray a blessing is a united giving of thanks. When they came together there was a united giving of thanks, for the bread and for the wine. Every Scripture about the Lord's Supper make this plain, that all Christians present in the Church in a spiritual oneness partook of the bread and the cup.

Spirituality and the Lord's Supper

Some comment: "You have no priest to administer the sacrament." Look into the Scriptures and if you find such a person then all New Testament churches will also have such a person. But you will look in vain, for the Bible never speaks of such a person. The New Testament Greek scholar Dean Alford writes: "The blessing of the cup and the breaking of the bread were not the acts of the minister as by any authority peculiar to himself, but only as the representative of the whole Christian congregation present. The figment of sacerdotal consecration of the elements by transmitted power is as alien from the Apostolic writing as it is from the spirit of the gospel." When a brother rises in this hall some Sunday morning, and gives thanks for the bread, he is only expressing the united thanksgiving of every Christian present. He is not a minister in any other sense than that.

One might say: "You do not even have a presiding elder to see that the service is kept in an orderly way." No, we do not. Look in chapter eleven of First Corinthians and find such a person if you can. You will have to put on a very powerful pair of reading glasses to find even the shadow of such a person, and if ever one was needed, it was at Corinth at that time. Drunken hands were being put to the cup of the Lord in Corinth, and if ever it was needful to reduce all this confusion, it was there. Well, how is order to be obtained. The apostles simply reaffirms divine principles to them. That is all. Let the Holy Ghost send home the Word of God to their hearts, and that will reduce chaos to order. Let them bow their wills to the Word of God, and seek to be guided by the Spirit of God. Brethren, at the Lord's Table, if the Word of God means anything, we have this: the Lord in the midst of us, the Spirit of God within us, and the Word of God behind us, do we want anymore. It is the body and blood of the Lord that are before us in symbols, and all through the Bible it is the Lordship of Christ that is emphasized, and if only the hearts of God's people understood what it means to have the Lord in the midst, then they will need neither priest nor presiding elder, but they will have sufficiency in the guidance of the Holy

Ghost. When I have put together all that is written about the Lord's Supper, I have to notice this: a peculiar absence of any rules; what seems to be a deliberate and designed vagueness as to details. You will not find a word in the New Testament as to the composition of the elements. Bread. Read where you will, it is bread. There are some who say that the Lord's Supper must be celebrated in the evening. The Scripture says: the first day of the week. It does not say any more than that. *"As often as you eat this bread..."* Isn't that delightfully free, lifting us above these details?

The Lord's method always required that we should have spirituality of mind. When we fall from spirituality, then we begin to make rules, and to bring in human expedients, to take the place of the beautiful simplicity and spirituality. "You say: This meeting, that seems to have no a leader, does it work?" It does this: it calls for constant exercise of heart on the part of the Lord's people, and God wants that from us all the time. If we fall into a routine, then the fall is great, all we all feel it. It means a solemn self-scrutiny before we come to the Lord's supper. It means a sincere heart and our eye completely upon the Lord. It means that we shall come up in the Spirit, on the Lord's day. Yes, it means all of that. But thank God it does. These are just the things we need to be kept fresh in, and that we need to be kept falling from. Now there is nothing whatever in this simple feast that merely pleases the flesh. No. when we come around that table, with its simple emblems, there is nothing there that will please that which is merely sensuous, aesthetic. No peals of thrilling music, no arched temple full of soft light that come through windows of stained glass, no purple and gold upon the vestments of the priests. No high altar of carved marble, no incense, filling the whole place with its heavy perfume. Nothing of all of this, that is so pleasing to the natural and sensuous aesthetic in man. But if it is only in a barn or a cottage kitchen, or a simple meeting house, where the twos and threes meet, because He said: *"This do in remembrance of me"*, and do so in all dependence upon Him, in all submission to His Lordship, in all sincerity, seeking to be guided by His Holy Spirit, those are hours nearest to heaven. Those are the minutes when the soul realized the presence of the Lord in a measure beyond all other hours. Then it is that the love of Christ melts our hearts and causes our eyes to overflow. Then it is that we look at the man of Calvary, and then it is that we stoop and kiss the Conqueror's feet. Then it is that we see afresh the wounded hand and side, and say with Thomas, *"my Lord and my God!"*

Endnotes

J. B. Watson (1884-1955) was the long time editor of Witness Magazine, co-author of "On the Sermon on the Mount", and a respected Bible teacher for many years in Great Britain.