

THE OBJECT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 29TH, 1905,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, †September 2nd, 1877.

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.” — [1 Corinthians 11:26](#).

IT seems to me that the Lord's supper should be received by us often. When the apostle says, in our text, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,” and our Lord said, in instituting the ordinance, “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me,” I will not say that their words absolutely teach that we should frequently come to the table of communion; but I do think they give us a hint that, if we act rightly, we shall often observe this supper of the Lord. Once or twice in the year can hardly be thought to be a sufficiently frequent memorial of one so dear. In the early Church, it is possible that they broke bread every day; the expression “breaking bread from house to house” may signify that. From the records preserved in the Acts of the Apostles, it appears that, when the saints came together on the first day of the week, they usually broke bread. If there be any rule as to the time for the observance of this ordinance, it surely is every Lord's day. At any rate, let it be often; do not, dear friends, absent yourselves long from the table; but, since your Lord has instituted this supper as a needful and admirable

reminder of his death, take care that you celebrate it often.

This supper is, according to the verse before our text, to be received by all Christian people: “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it.” It is not to the apostles, nor to a few men who shall dare to call themselves priests, but to the members of the church at Corinth, and, by implication, to the members of all Christian churches, that the apostle writes, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” Though it be but half a dozen of the very poorest and most illiterate Christians who meet together to break bread, they are helping to show Christ’s death till he come. It is the duty and the privilege of all the people of God, and not merely of some of them, to observe this ordinance.

It is to be observed by eating and drinking; not by eating alone, as in the Romish church: “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” It is most strange that the Papists should have taken away the cup from the “laity” so-called, since our Lord never said to his disciples concerning the bread, “Eat ye all of it;” but, as if he foresaw that this error would arise, he did say concerning the cup, as he presented it to his apostles, “Drink ye all of it.” If you leave out the cup, you have marred the ordinance; and, as I shall have to show you presently, you have robbed it of a great part of its meaning. In the Romish church,—Romish, do I say? Why! there is another church, nearer home, that is twin sister to it, and is getting very like it; and there, too, it is taught that looking at the cup does the spectators good. It is not needful that they should “communicate”, but if they see the “priest” lift the cup, it will do them great good. This is a new way of blessing souls. Salvation used to come by the hearing of the Word; but now, forsooth, it is to be by seeing fine sights. But the apostle says, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup,”—not as often as ye look

on as spectators, but as often as ye actually become partakers in this symbolic feast, “ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

You notice that our translators have put this sentence in the indicative, but it is probable that the marginal reading is more correct, and that it may be read thus, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, shew ye the Lord’s death till he come.” Endeavour to do it,—realize that you are doing it,—let your feelings be appropriate to the meaning of the ordinance: “shew ye the Lord’s death till he come.” As often as true believers meet together to eat this bread, and drink this cup, they do show, both to themselves and to all who look on, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just in passing, notice that it is bread that they eat, and it is wine that they drink; nothing is said about transubstantiation here; but “as often as ye eat this bread,”—and it is bread, and nothing but bread,—“and drink this cup,” which still remains but a cup, and its contents just what they were before,—“ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

This will suffice upon the words of the text; and, now, the doctrine that I want to draw from it is that, at all times when we come to the communion table, we show the death of Christ. That is the great end and object of the Lord’s supper,—to set forth—to tell out anew—to proclaim afresh the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. First, let us consider HOW THIS ORDINANCE DOES SHOW THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

It is all very simple; there is nothing but bread broken and eaten, and wine poured out, and afterwards drunk. How can this show the death of Christ? Well, it does. It has done so ever since it was instituted, and there are multitudes of believers who delight to see that death set forth by it.

First, *it sets forth the painfulness of Christ’s death.* It is death that is

represented by these emblems, for there is the bread, and there is the wine, both separate from one another. When the flesh and the blood of a person are together, they do not present to us the image of death; but the bread, which represents the flesh, altogether separate from the wine, which represents the blood, is the picture of death, and death in a violent form,—death by wounding, by bleeding. The separation of the life-blood from the body is the form of death which is manifestly set forth here to all onlookers. To my mind, the very bread, as we break it, seems to say, “Thus Christ becomes our food.” Bread has to pass through many tortures before it becomes food to us. The wheat was sown in the ground; it was buried; it sprang up; it was exposed to cold winds and to hot sunshine before it ripened, and then it was cut down by a sharp sickle. After being cut down, it was threshed, then it was ground into flour, then the dough was kneaded into bread, which was baked in an oven, and cut with a knife,—all of which processes may be used as images of suffering. So the broken bread, which we eat at the communion, sets forth the suffering of Jesus; and the juice of the grape also sets forth suffering, for the clusters from the vine are flung together into the winepress, and trodden by the feet of men, or otherwise pressed until their lifeblood spurts forth. Even so was the Saviour pressed in the winepress of Jehovah’s wrath till his blood was poured forth on our behalf. This supper sets forth, to all who choose to see it, the painfulness of Christ’s death.

It sets forth, next, that *it was a death of a peculiar kind, a death for others*, just as that bread is for us to eat, and that cup is for us to partake of. So we say, by this ordinance, to all who look on, and especially to ourselves, “When the Lord Jesus died, he died for all his people.” We here declare that we believe in substitution,—that Christ died “the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;” and that he, “his own self

bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” That is the teaching of this supper, that Christ’s death was a painful death, and a death on behalf of others.

This supper also shows that *we believe the death of Christ to be acceptable to God*. Why do we spread this table here in the place where we customarily meet for worship? Is this also an act of worship? Assuredly it is, and one of the highest kind. But we should not dare to put these memorials of the death of Christ before the Father if we did not know that the Father had accepted him. But “it pleased the Lord to bruise him,” and he was pleased with the sacrifice which his Son offered. He smelled a sweet savour of rest in the death of his dear Son. Therefore, when we worship him in the most humble manner, and after the most solemn fashion, we say to the Lord, “We know that thou hast accepted the atonement offered by thy dear Son, and we set him forth before all mankind as the accepted sacrifice before his Father’s face.”

And I think that we also mean to say, by this ordinance, that *Christ’s sacrifice is complete and perfect*. We should not wish to show it to others if it were not worthy of being looked at? If it were incomplete, we might well keep it in the background until Christ had finished it; but because the cry, “It is finished,” rang out from the lips of the dying Sufferer of Calvary, we rejoice to set forth his death to all who come this way. Behold, and see that he hath not partly paid the price, but he hath paid it all. Look ye here, he hath so finished his atoning work that he hath spread a feast to which his servants may come, and rejoice with exceeding joy. If the sacrifice were not finished, it would not yet be feasting time; but it is complete, and, therefore, do we show it forth after this fashion.

Another great truth that we teach to everybody who sees us at the communion table is this, — *Jesus Christ has died, and we live upon his death*.

This bread and this wine are the emblems of his broken body and his shed blood; and, therefore, we eat them, and drink them, and so say to you that Christ's dying is our life. Whenever we want to get spiritually stronger, we always feed upon the truth that Christ died for us. Do any of you deny the doctrine of substitution? We tell you that it is the very essence of our being;—that, henceforth, it has become the wellspring of life to us. We could not be happy—we could not have any peace—if that were taken away from us. My heart speaketh now in words of truth and soberness, and says to you, "There is no truth which I dare to deny; but, concerning this truth of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it would be absolutely impossible for me to doubt it." Tortures and racks may tear away the strings that are bound about my heart, but they can never make me relax the hold that I have of Jesus Christ my Lord. No; the Lamb of Calvary, bleeding in our room, and place, and stead, has become essential to our very being, and we cannot, we must not, we will not becloud that blessed doctrine of his substitutionary sacrifice. Is it not all in all to us?

We also say to dear friends who may look on at this feast that *the death of Jesus Christ has now become to us the source of our highest joy*. We are not about to celebrate a funeral. When we come to this table, we do not come there in mournful guise. I know that it has pleased the authorities of certain churches to make men kneel before what they call the altar; but why have they to kneel? Is there any passage of Scripture in which there is even the shadow of any teaching which looks that way. At the passover, the Israelites stood with their loins girt and their staves in their hand. Why was that? Because they were expecting to go out of Egypt, and were not then out of the land of bondage. He, who is under the law, when he eats his passover, must eat it with his loins girt and with his staff in his hand; but how did the disciples eat the Lord's sup-

per? Why, reclining in the easiest posture possible. It was a most solemn supper, but it was a supper. It was the ordinary meal consecrated by the Lord to the great purpose of setting forth his death; and to make us kneel to receive it is, to my mind, to take away a great part of the teaching of it. We should sit at the communion as easily as we possibly can,—as we would at our own table, because “we which have believed do enter into rest;” and part of the teaching of the Lord’s supper is that now, in Christ, we have perfect peace, and we rest in him as we feed upon him. This ordinance is a feast, not now a subject for sorrow, but a theme for delight.

And once more, beloved, when we come to the Lord’s table to show Christ’s death, *we show it as the bond of Christian union*. The point of union among Christians is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am afraid that it will be many long years before we shall get all believers to agree concerning baptism. I hope right views of that ordinance are spreading, but it does not seem to me to be a point where all Christians are likely yet to unite; but, concerning our Lord’s death, all who really are his people are agreed. If we are in him, we rejoice in that grand foundation truth, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” and we delight to think that, by his death, he has redeemed us from death. So, dear brothers and sisters, if you cannot meet your fellow-Christians on certain doctrines, because some of you are strong men in Christ, and others are but babes, and the babes cannot crack the nuts or eat the strong meat upon which some feed, you can all unite in Christ. He is like the manna, which suited all the Israelites in the wilderness; young or old, they could all feed on the manna, and so can all the saints feed on Christ. And when we sit at the communion table, we say to all the world, “We are all one in Christ Jesus; we do not come to this table as Baptists, or Episcopalians, or Methodists, or Presbyterians; we come

here simply as those who form one body in Christ, they who agree to show forth to all mankind the death of our adorable Lord.”

II. Secondly, let us consider WHY THE LORD HAS TAKEN MEANS TO SHOW THIS TRUTH.

There are a great many important truths in the Bible, and every truth ought to be kept in remembrance; but it is not concerning every truth that the Lord has appointed an ordinance to keep it in memory. The doctrine of election is one that we firmly believe; but we have no special token, type, or symbol to set it forth.

It is the death of Christ which is set forth by this memorial supper. Why was that chosen? I answer, *because it is the most vital of all truths.* Concerning the sacrificial death of Christ, there must not be tolerated any dispute in the Christian Church. That must for ever stand as a settled doctrine of the gospel. The atoning death of Jesus Christ once put away, you have taken the sun out of the Church's heavens. Indeed, you have taken away all reason for the very existence of the Church of Christ. I think it was Dr. Priestley, who was a Unitarian, and who had a brother, who was a sound Calvinistic divine, and who came and visited him, and he agreed to let him preach for him, one Sabbath morning, on condition that he promised not to preach on any controversial subject. The good man gave the promise, but rather repented, afterwards, that he had done so; yet he managed to redeem his promise and also to clear his conscience, for he preached, on the next Sabbath morning, from this text: “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh;” from, which he proved that the Godhead of Christ is a truth about which no controversy could be allowed. We put the doctrine of his substitutionary sacrifice in the same category; there is no true Christianity without it. You have given us merely the shell and the husk if you take away this great central truth of the

gospel,—God’s justice vindicated by the death of his dear Son, and, on that ground, free pardon published by the grace of God to the very chief of sinners who believe in him. This doctrine, which some despise and decry, is the very essence of the gospel of Christ. We have no question with regard to the truth of it, neither do we speak with bated breath concerning it; for our Lord Jesus instituted this supper in order to keep this truth before men’s minds, because it is the point above all others that is vital to the gospel.

Another reason is, *because so many combat this doctrine*. It has been the Hougomont of the great Waterloo which has been fought against Christ. All his adversaries rally against, this truth. When any man becomes unsound upon other points, if you probe deeply enough, you will find that he has become unsound upon the doctrine of the atonement. The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is the one thing which his enemies are aiming to overthrow. They cannot endure it; they profess to be greatly offended by our frequent use of the word blood; yet that word is one of the most conspicuous in both the Old and the New Testaments, so still will we say, “Without shedding of blood is no remission,” and “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” This communion table sets forth the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and so brings his atoning sacrifice before men’s minds; and thus his Church, so often as she observes this ordinance, shows Christ’s death in the teeth of all opposers, and this she means still to do “till he come.”

No doubt the Lord also instituted a symbol for the maintenance and propagation of this truth, *because it is a most blessed one to sinners*. Poor souls, there is no comfort for you till you know that Christ died in your stead. Your conscience, if it be really aroused, will never be pacified with ceremonies; nor will it be contented with moral precepts which

you cannot carry out; nor will it be lulled to slumber with the idea of your own religiousness ever saving you. Your awakened conscience makes you ask, “How can God be just and yet pardon me?” And it is the martyred body of your Lord that answers that question.

“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.”

But when you come to see Christ on the cross dying instead of you, then will comfort come into your mind, O distracted seeker; but not till then. Therefore is it that God bids his ministers preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, and therefore is it that, as often as we come to this table, we show his death, because sinners need that beyond everything else.

And, beloved, there is another reason, I think, why this truth was selected to be set forth in this memorial supper, namely, *that it might certify the truth to your own soul*. What arrow will ever pierce the heart of sin unless it be dipped in the blood of Jesus? But when I see sin punished on Christ, I see the evil of it. When I see Christ dying for my sin, I see the great motive for my dying to my sin. When I behold his griefs and pangs on my behalf, I see a reason why I should make abundant sacrifices in order that I may glorify him. Beloved, the death of Christ is the great sin-killer; and he who truly knows it, and understands it, will feel its sanctifying power.

At the same time, *this truth greatly glorifies God*. When do you ever praise God so well as when you, a poor guilty sinner, stand at the foot of the cross, and see that there Christ died for you? The sweetest songs in all the world are those that are sung around the cross by sinners saved by sovereign grace; and each one sings unto the Lord, “Wash me in the

fountain, and make me whiter than snow; then shall every part of my being praise thee, and my whole nature shall break forth in ecstatic joy magnifying and blessing the name of the Lord who is able to put away such offences as mine through the precious blood of his dear Son.” You will thus be enabled to glorify God when you come to this table, and meditate on the great atoning sacrifice by which your sin is for ever put away.

I feel that I can say, without boasting, that my ministry and this ordinance agree well together. I have long preached to you Jesus Christ and him crucified, I have fully preached to you his vicarious sacrifice; and when you come to this table, you can realize that the truth which I have preached to you links on to this ordinance. But how anyone can piece together a dry philosophy and this service, I do not know; having left out the grand fundamental doctrine of atonement, how they can make anything but a farce of the communion, I cannot even guess. I should think they might as well abolish it from their services, and let the symbol go when the substance has already gone. But it cannot be so with us, for we feel that God would have his people think of Jesus always; he would have them speak of Jesus often; he would have them bear witness to the death of Jesus continually; and, therefore, he makes this communion to be the sweetest of ordinances to point us, with unerring finger, to Christ on the cross.

III. Now, thirdly, will you please to notice THE PERPETUITY OF THIS ORDINANCE, AND THE REASON FOR THAT PERPETUITY? “Ye do shew the Lord’s death *till he come.*” When he comes, we shall not need these symbols, for we shall have the Master himself with us, but “*till he come*” we are to observe this ordinance.

What do I learn from this? Why, dear friends, that *his death will be efficacious “till he come.”* You are not called to show to the world something

that is worn out; you do not come to this table to set forth to the people who will look on something whose force is spent. Oh, no! You can still sing,—

“Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransom’d Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.”

And every time any of you, who are unconverted, but are seeking the Lord, see this table spread, you should say to yourselves, “Those people believe that there is still efficacy in Christ’s blood, or else they would not keep up the observance of that supper.” Yes, we do believe just that, and we believe that Jesus is able to save you now if you come to him,—able at once to speak peace and pardon to your heart if you do but trust him.

Another thing I learn from our text is that, as this supper is to be celebrated “till he come,” *it shows that there will always be a Church of Christ to celebrate it.* There always has been a Church of Christ since he founded it. In the darkest Popish days, Christ always had his little Church to observe this ordinance. In the catacombs at Rome, in the mountains of Bohemia, in the Vaudois valleys, in the wild glens of Scotland, and in almost every land, in the simple breaking of bread and the pouring out of wine believers still remembered Christ’s death, even though they met together at the peril of their lives; and right on down to these brighter days, in which we can meet two or three at a time, or hundreds or thousands at once, to break bread and to drink wine in remembrance of our dying Lord, there has always been a Church of Christ, and there will always be a Church of Christ, so do not despair however dark the days may yet be. Neither Rome nor hell itself can put out the candle which has been lit by the Lord, and there will be a Church

of Christ “till he come.”

It is true that there will always be people to oppose this doctrine, and one reason why you are to continue to observe this ordinance is because there will always be some people who will deny Christ’s substitutionary death. Dear friends and fellow-helpers in the Lord, it seems such a sweet thing to me to think that all the communicants at this ordinance to-night will be helping to preach a sermon upon our text. I alone must do the talking, but you, who will presently gather around the communion table, will unite in this act, by which we shall all say, “Christ died on Calvary’s cross, Christ died for us;” and all the other truths that I have been mentioning to you. By the very eating of the bread, and the drinking of the wine, you will proclaim again that there are some who believe in the bleeding Saviour,—some who still believe in him as dying in their room, and place, and stead. Let others deny it if they will, you will maintain that testimony.

Beloved, this ordinance is to be perpetual, *because Christian hearts will always need it*. There were some people, a little while ago, who were getting so wonderfully perfect (in their own estimation) that I thought, at the time, they would soon give up the observance of ordinances. I read of one of them, who said that he did not pray any longer, for his mind was so perfectly sanctified and conformed to the will of God that he did not need to ask anything of God! Poor fool! That was all I could say of a person in such a state of heart as that. When any man gets beyond the need of prayer, he has urgent need to begin his Christian life again; and it is the same with those who have got beyond the need of ordinances. Christ knew that we should never, in this life, be able to do without outward ordinances; he knew that his people would be forgetful, even of himself, so he gave us this double “forget-me-not”—this sweet memorial of his death, that as oft as we observe it, we may observe it in

remembrance of him.

Moreover, *the world itself will always need this ordinance*. There will never come a day when the world will not need to have the crucified Christ set before it; there will never be an hour in which there will not be breaking hearts that need consolation, wandering souls that need reclaiming, and others who are seeking self-salvation, who will need to be taught that salvation lies in Another, and is to be found only in the bleeding Lamb of Calvary. May God help us to maintain this testimony for the world's sake, for the poor sinner's sake, for our own sake, and for Christ's sake "till he come."

IV. I have done when I have made one other remark, which, is this; if what I have said about this ordinance is true, then, LET US ATTEND TO IT. If in this way we set forth Christ's death,—if our coming to the table of communion calls attention to that great fact,—if we unite, in this act of fellowship, in testimony to the death of Christ, let us attend to it.

What shall I say to some of you who, I trust, have Christ as your Master, but who have never yet obeyed this command of his? Let me ask you whether he has ever given you exemption from the observance of this ordinance, and let me also ask you whether, as he thought it wise to ordain this ordinance, you ought not to think it wise to observe it. Did he institute it in order that you might neglect it? Has he instituted any ordinance which it is right for his people to neglect? Do you know how much you have already lost through your disobedience to your Lord's command? You tell me that it will not save you. I know that; and you know as well as I do that you should not come to the communion if you thought it would save you, for none are invited to come but those who are already saved. But I should like you to look at this matter in the way in which a poor young man spoke of the other ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. He had not all his wits, but the grace of God had

been at work within him, and as he lay dying, his chief regret was that he had not been baptized. His sister said to him, "Well, but you know, Isaac, that baptism will not save you." He answered, "I know that very well, for I am already saved; but," he added, "I expect to meet the Lord Jesus Christ very soon, and I should not like him to say to me, 'Why did you not do that little thing to please me?'" There is much force in that remark. The smaller the thing is, the greater reason is there why we should attend to it directly, lest we should be supposed to say, "I would not do even that little thing to please Christ." If coming to the communion table would save you, of course you would come out of sheer selfishness; but if your religion is nothing but selfishness, may the Lord have mercy upon you, and give you a far better one! It is the privilege of those who are saved to show their obedience to Christ, and their love to him by coming to his table. Do you think that you can look him in the face, and say, "My Lord, thou hast instituted this ordinance to be observed in remembrance of thee, but I have never observed it"? May he not look upon you, and say, "It is but a small thing, and it is for your soul's good, can you not do that for me?" You ought to question whether you are in a right state of heart if you can be negligent of this command of your Lord.

But I must also speak to those who do observe the ordinance in a fashion, but who do not enter into the true spirit of it. Those who come rightly to the table show Christ's death "till he come;" but I am afraid that there are, at all communion services, some who do not think aright concerning Christ's death. I always feel very sad, when I am presiding at this ordinance, if I find my thoughts wandering away from the last dread scene upon the cross. I would rather not be at the table of my Lord than be here thinking of something else beside his sufferings and death. What can be the use of the outward ordinance if inward and spir-

itual grace be lacking? Beg the Lord to tether all your thoughts to the cross. Make this your prayer, “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar,” and let that altar be the broken body of your Lord upon the tree. Of him let me think, and in him let me rest, all through the communion service, and let me see to it that I do reverently, humbly, heartily show his death “till he come.”

Come then, beloved, unworthy as you are, come to his table. Come trembling because of your sin, but rejoicing in his sacrifice, and grateful for his great love. Come and trust him over again; come and give yourselves up to him once more; come and renew your vows of affection and devotion. Come and put your finger into the print of the nails, and thrust your hand into his pierced side. Nay, more than that, say what the spouse does as she begins the song of songs, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.” Seek to get near to him, to come into close contact with him; and when you do so, hold him fast, and do not let him go, but call together your friends and Christian brethren, and say to them, “Here is the Master; come with me, and let us together have sweet fellowship with him.” If, to-night, at the communion table, I might thus lay hold of the great Angel of the Covenant, I think I should feel inclined to hold him till the break of day, as Jacob did at Jabbok; and if he should make my sinews shrink, yet would I bless his name for condescending to tarry and wrestle with me. If you can get into contact with him, make this your resolve, that you will hold fast, and will say to him, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”