

THE RIGHT OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, †SEPTEMBER 3RD, 1899,

DELIVERED BY

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“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”—[1 Corinthians 11:23–26](#).

WE have no respect whatever for the ordinances of men in religion. Anything that is only invented by churches, or councils, is nothing whatever to us. We know of two ordinances instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ,—the baptism of believers and the Lord's supper; and we utterly abhor and reject all pretended sacraments of every kind. And because we observe these two ordinances, and these two only, we are the more concerned that they should be properly used, and duly understood, and that they should minister to the edification of those who participate in them. We would have those who are baptized understand what is meant by that expressive rite,—that they, being dead with Christ, should also

be buried with him, and rise with him into newness of life. And when we observe the Lord's supper, we feel a deep and earnest desire that none should come to the table in ignorance of the signification of the observance,—or that, at least, ignorance may not be an occasion of eating unworthily; but that we may comprehend what we are doing, and understand the spiritual meaning of this pictorial instruction by which the Lord Jesus Christ would, even until the end of the age, remind his Church of his great sacrifice upon the cross.

I. So, first, I will speak briefly concerning THE FORM OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

We do not think that it is at all material where that supper is held. It is just as valid and helpful in your own private apartments, in your bedroom, or in your parlour, as it is in any place where Christians usually congregate. We do not attach so much importance as some people do to the time when it is observed; but we are astonished that High Churchmen should be opposed to evening communion, for, if any definite time for partaking of it can be quoted from Scripture, it certainly is the evening. I should like to ask the Ritualists whether they can find any instance, either in holy or profane things, of a supper being eaten before breakfast, until they invented that absurd practice. There is no time that is more like the first occasion when the Master celebrated the ordinance with his disciples than is the evening of the day. Then it was that he gathered the twelve apostles together, and instituted this blessed memorial feast. At Emmaus, too, it was at the close of the day that he was made known to his two disciples in the breaking of bread. It must be sheer superstition, utterly unwarranted by Holy Scripture, which tells us that the Lord's *supper* can only be properly received *in the morning*, and that we ought not to eat anything before we partake of the sacred emblems! We reject all such nonsense, for we find no authority

for it in the only standard which we recognize, that is, the inspired Word of God. Let us see what it teaches us concerning this ordinance.

We learn, first, that *the Lord's supper should begin with thanksgiving*. So the Master himself evidently commenced it: "He took bread and gave thanks." All through the supper, the emotion of gratitude should be in active exercise. It is intended that we should give thanks for the bread,—at the same time giving still more emphatic thanks for the sacred body which it represents;—then we should also give thanks for the cup, and for that most precious blood which is therein represented to us. We cannot rightly observe the Lord's supper unless we come to the table, blessing, praising, magnifying, and adoring our Saviour,—praising him even for instituting such a festival of remembrance,—such a memorial ordinance to help our frail memories;—and praising him yet more for giving us so blessed a thing to remember as his own great sacrifice for our sin.

After the thanksgiving, it is very clear that our Divine Lord *broke the bread*. We scarcely know what kind of bread was used on that occasion; it was probably the thin passover cake of the Jews; but there is nothing said in Scripture about the use of leavened or unleavened bread, and therefore it matters not which we use. Where there is no ordinance, there is no obligation; and we are, therefore, left free to use the bread which it is our custom to eat. When the Master had broken the bread, *he gave it to his disciples*, and said, "Take, eat;" and they all participated in eating it. And this, mark you, is essential to the right observance of the Lord's supper; so that, when the priest, in celebrating mass, takes the wafer, which is not bread, and which he does not break, but which he himself eats whole, there is no Lord's supper there. Whatever it may be called, it is not the Lord's supper. In the eating of the bread, there must be the participation of such a number of faithful, godly disciples of

Christ as may be present, or else it is not the ordinance which the Lord instituted.

That being done, the next thing was that, “*After the same manner also he took the cup;*” that is to say, after the same manner of thanksgiving, blessing God for the fruit of the vine, which was henceforth to be the emblem of his poured-out blood. Even so should we do. It is no vain thing to praise the Lord, though we do it twice, thrice,—ay, and ten thousand times. Well did the psalmist say, “Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.” Specially comely is it for us to praise our God when we are calling to remembrance the unspeakable gift of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son.

Then came the partaking of the cup,—the fruit of the vine,—of which the Master expressly said, “Drink ye all of it.” Hence, when the Church of Rome takes away the cup from the people, and denies it to them, there is no observance of the Lord’s supper, for another essential part of the ordinance is left out. It may be the mass, or it may be anything else; but it is not the supper of the Lord. There must be a participation by all the faithful in the cup, as well as in the bread. Otherwise, the Lord’s death is not shown, or proclaimed, according to Christ’s most holy and blessed command.

Further, in order that this may be the Lord’s supper in very truth, *it must be observed in remembrance of Christ*, who said to his disciples, “This do in remembrance of me.” From which we learn that only those who know him must come to his table, for how shall we remember what we never knew? And how shall we remember him with whom we have never spoken, and in whom we have never believed. You are not to come to the Lord’s supper to get faith; you must have faith first, or else you have no right to draw nigh to this sacred spot. What do ye here? If you

suppose that this is a saving ordinance, I must say to you what Christ said to the Sadducees, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” Salvation comes to us through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is the result of the effectual working of the Spirit of God within us. This supper is a most instructive ordinance for those who are saved; but those who are not born again, and are not, by grace, members of the Lord’s family, have no right here. They who ate the passover were such as were born in the priest’s house, or bought with the priest’s money; and if you have been born in Christ’s house, or bought with Christ’s blood,—if you know, by blessed experience, the meaning of regeneration and redemption,—then may you come to the communion table. But, if not, as the passover was only intended for Israel, so is this supper a family feast for those who belong to Jesus Christ, and no others may come to it; if they do come, it will be at the peril of eating and drinking unworthily, since they are unable to discern the Lord’s body.

I have thus given you a very brief account of the form of observing the Lord’s supper, as we find it in the New Testament. You notice that I have not said anything about a chalice, or a paten, or about consecrating the elements, or uplifting the host, and all that Romish rubbish of which some people think so much. The reason for my silence is that there is nothing about these things in the Bible. “To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Clear away all the additions of superstition, they are but the dust and the rust which have accumulated during the ages, and they spoil and mar the purity of Christ’s own ordinance. Our great concern must be, to observe it exactly as he has delivered it unto us, in accordance with his own injunction, “*This* do in remembrance of me;”—not something else in its place.

II. Now, secondly, from our text, I gather THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LORD’S

SUPPER.

First, *because it was revealed by the Lord himself*. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all accessible to Paul; and, though they had not then written their Gospels, yet he could have learnt from them how the Saviour instituted the supper, But, as if Christ would not let it be second-hand, he was pleased to declare to Paul personally—to Paul himself, directly and distinctly,—how the supper should be celebrated. The apostle says, “I have received of the Lord,”—not “we”,—not “I and the rest of the apostles and disciples,” but—“I have received of the Lord,” indicating a definite personal revelation from Christ as to this matter. After the Lord Jesus had gone up into his glory, his revelations were but few; yet this was one of them. He would have his disciples, therefore, pay due attention to this important matter which he thus specially revealed to Paul. O beloved, I often tremble for those who tamper with the ordinances of Christ; they alter them, or shift them out of their proper places, and then say that their alterations are unimportant. Mary said to the servants at Cana of Galilee, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it;” and we have need of the same command to-day. We must not alter anything that Christ has ordained; for, “where the word of a king is, there is power;” and, in the word of the King of kings, there is power to condemn those who alter his Word. Whatsoever Christ has commanded, is to be obeyed by us; and as he took special pains concerning this ordinance, to make a distinct revelation over and above the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the four Evangelists, we may be certain that he intended to surround this supper with the utmost solemnity and authority.

I have already referred to the next point, but it is so important that I remind you again that *this supper was commanded by the Lord*. He said,

“This do in remembrance of me;” and again, “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” If I love Christ, I am bound to keep his commandments; and among the rest of his commandments, this one in which he here says, “This do.” I might have thought, from the conduct of some professing Christians, that Jesus must have said, “*This do not;*” but as he said, “This do ye,” where shall I find an apology for those who either never have done it at all, or, being his people, do it so seldom that he could not say to them, “This do ye, as *oft* as ye drink it,” but he might rather say, “This do ye as *seldom* as ye drink it,” since the idea of frequency does not enter into their observance of it? But, dear friends, what Christ revealed, and commanded, it is incumbent upon his own beloved ones to obey.

Notice, again, that *this supper was instituted by Christ himself, and he himself first set the example for its observance.* As to baptism, you remember how he said, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,” and so he set us the example in that matter; and, in the supper, it was he who first blessed and brake the bread, it was he who first passed the cup, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” If he had given the command, and the apostles had been the first to attend to it, it would have been binding upon us; but, inasmuch as, in addition to giving the command concerning it, he himself set the example of observing it, sitting at the centre of the table, with the twelve all around him, I think he has put a special halo about this ordinance, and we must by no means forget, or neglect, or despise it.

Remember, too, that *he established it on a very special occasion.* To my mind, it is very touching to read, “The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread.” I cannot help noticing that the apostle is very particular to say here, “The Lord Jesus.” Very often, he uses the name “Christ” in speaking of the Saviour; but here it is, “the Lord

Jesus,” to show the awe and reverence which the apostle felt as, by faith, he saw the Master at the first communion table. Paul could not forget that, though Jesus was then Lord of all, he was that same night betrayed. He that ate bread with him lifted up his heel against him, and sold him for thirty pieces of silver; yet, even while the anticipation of that betrayal, and all which it involved, was tearing his heart asunder, he remembered us, and established this ordinance that, by refreshing our memories concerning his blessed self, we might not be left to play the traitor, too, but might be kept steadfast in every time of trial. O brethren, it seems to me that we must be specially careful to observe such an ordinance as this, instituted when our Saviour’s heart was breaking with anguish on our behalf!

And do remember, too, the importance of the ordinance, because of *the peculiar personal motive with which it was instituted*: “This do in remembrance”—of what? Of Christianity, and its doctrines and practices? No; but, “in remembrance of ME.” You know how tenderly a thing comes home to you if a dying husband says, “This do, my beloved one, in remembrance of me, when I am dead and gone.” You never fail to do that, I am sure, if it is in your power. You know how it is with a friend, who has gone from you, and who has left you some forget-me-not. You treasure it with the utmost care; the memento is very precious for your friend’s sake; and our dear Lord and Master has put about this supper all the loveliness of his personality, all the graciousness of his affection for us, and all the tenderness that ought to be in our love to him. If there is anything that he bids you do, you ought to do it; but when it is something to be done in remembrance of him, you must do it; your love impels you to do it. Are you not ashamed if you are not doing it in the most loving, humble, grateful, and earnest manner possible, as becomes the memory of him who loved you, and gave himself for you? I should

not like to urge any Christian to come to the communion table; I feel as if I would do nothing to spoil the perfect spontaneity of it. If you do not love him, do not come to his table; but if you do love him, come because you love him; come because you remember him, and because you wish to be helped to remember him yet more. If there is nothing about him that you wish to remember, do not dare to come; but, if he be precious to your soul, your transport and your trust, if his very name is music to your ear, and honey to your mouth, and joy to your heart, then you do not need me to press you to come to his table, but you will come because he says, "This do ye in remembrance of me."

There is one more thing which adds to the importance of this supper; and that is *it is to be observed "till he come."* It is not an ordinance, then, for the first Christian centuries alone, to be, as it were, the bridge between the ceremonialism of the Old Testament and the spirituality of the New Testament. No; it is intended to be celebrated "till he come." We must keep on gathering at his table, giving thanks, breaking bread, and proclaiming his death, till the trump of the archangel shall startle us, and then we shall feel it to be truly blessed to be found obediently remembering him when he puts in his appearance at the last. As he comes to us, we shall say, "Blessed Master, we have done as thou didst bid us; we have kept alive thy memory in the world, to ourselves, and to those who looked on as we broke the bread, and drank of the cup, in thy name, and now we rejoice to see thee in thy glory." I do not know that the meeting between Christ and his people could happen at a better time than if he were to come when they were gathered at his table, obeying his command, and showing his death "till he come."

Thus I have tried, as briefly as I could, to give instruction as to the importance of this supper. I hope that the Holy Spirit will press home the truth upon the hearts of any who have not observed this ordinance

hitherto; and that he will lead them to ask, if they are indeed believers in Jesus, and lovers of the Lord, how they can justify themselves for their disobedience to what Christ has so expressly commanded.

III. But now, thirdly, let us enquire, IN WHAT SPIRIT OUGHT WE TO COME TO THIS TABLE?

I should say, first, that we are bound to come in the spirit of *deep humility*. Brethren, to my mind, it is a very humbling thing that we should need anything to help us to remember Christ. I see no better evidence of the fact that we are not yet perfectly sanctified, for, if we were, we should need nothing to help us to remember him. There is, alas! still an imperfection in our memory; and that, strangest and saddest thing of all, in respect to Jesus himself. It is extraordinary that we should ever require anything to help us to remember him. Can he, to whom we owe so much, be ever forgotten by us? The fact that this ordinance is to be observed, in remembrance of him “till he come,” is a humbling proof that, till that glorious event, his people’s memories will be faulty, and they will need this double forget-me-not to remind them of him who is their All-in-all.

What do I see on that table? I see bread there. Then I gather this humbling lesson,—that I cannot even keep myself in spiritual food. I am such a pauper, such an utter beggar, that my own table cannot furnish me with what I want, and I must come to the Lord’s table, and I must receive, through him, the spiritual nutriment which my soul requires. What do I see in the cup? I see the wine which is the token of his shed blood; what does that say to me but that I still need cleansing? Oh, how I rejoice in that blessed text in John’s first Epistle: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another”! And then what follows? That we do not need to make any more confession of sin, because we are quite cleansed from it? Nothing of the sort; “and the

blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” We still need the cleansing fountain even when we are walking in the light, as God is in the light; and we need to come to it every day. And what a mercy it is that the emblem sets forth the constant provision of purifying blood whereby we may be continually cleansed! As we partake of this cup, we must do so humbly, for thus it becometh us to come to the table of our Lord.

But, next, we must come *very thankfully*. Some pull a long face when they think about coming to the communion table; like Mrs. Toogood, who is described in Rowland Hill’s *Village Dialogues*. She made a mistake about the week that the ordinance was to be observed, so she did not play cards during that week, and kept herself wonderfully pure, poor old soul; and then, when she found, on the Sunday, that she had made a blunder as to the time, she said she had wasted the whole week in getting ready! Ah, dear friends! I hope we do not know anything of that method of keeping the sacred feast; we are to come in a very different frame of mind from that, for we are not coming to a funeral supper, but to the luxuries and dainties that become a marriage feast. Let us come, therefore, with thankfulness, as we say to one another concerning our Lord, “He is not here, for he is risen, glory be to his holy name!” These tokens of remembrance tell us that he has gone where it was expedient for him to go, that the Holy Spirit might descend upon us. Therefore, beloved, rejoice even because of the absence of your Lord, for it is well that he should be gone up into the glory. And, as we come to the table, each one feeling what a sinner he is,—how unworthy he is to come,—how unfit he is to sit with saints,—should not each heart say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name”? Twice during the feast, special thanksgivings are to be presented; but all through the feast, let the heart be full of holy gratitude

and praise to God.

But, certainly, we should come to the table *with great thoughtfulness*. There are some, we are told, who do not discern the Lord's body; let us think, and pray, lest we should be numbered with them. If there be no right thinking, there will be no true spiritual feeling, and there will be no Lord's supper so far as you are concerned. Think of what your Saviour suffered for you, what he has done for you, and what he has gone to prepare for you. Let us remember that the bread sets forth the suffering of his body, that the wine typifies the blood of the atonement whereby we are cleansed,—that the two apart, the body separated from the blood, form a most suggestive symbol of the matchless death whereby we are made to live. Think much at the table, but think of nothing but Christ. Fix your thoughts entirely upon him, and so shall you eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, to your soul's refreshment and profit.

But come, also, *with great receptiveness*. It is a meal, you know; we receive the bread and the wine. So, come to the table begging the Lord to give you the grace to feed upon himself spiritually, that you may, by faith, receive him into your inward parts; that, in your inmost soul, you may have the virtue of his life and of his death. Come empty, therefore; for so you will be the better qualified to feed upon him. Come hungering and thirsting; thus you will have the greater appetite for Christ. Receive him in all his fulness, by a wonderful faith that takes him in to be a joy to the heart for ever.

That is the spirit, then, in which to come to the Lord's table. May the blessed Spirit be with you, dear brothers and sisters, that all who do come to the table may come in that humble, thankful, thoughtful, receptive style!

IV. Now I finish my discourse by dwelling, for a minute or two, upon

THE GREAT LESSONS WHICH THIS SUPPER INCIDENTALLY TEACHES.

The first lesson is, that *Jesus is for us*. There has been a great dispute over this verse, “This is my body, which is broken for you.” The word “broken” appears in some of the ancient manuscripts; but it is, undoubtedly, an interpolation. It is absent from several of those manuscripts upon which we are obliged to rely for the correct text of the New Testament; and, hence, very properly, the Revised Version reads, “This is my body, which is for you.” And, to my mind, that rendering gives a new thought which is well worth having. “This is my body, which is for you.” That is to say, Christ is for you; does not the supper itself say that? The bread represents his body for you; the wine represents his blood for you. We know that it is for you, because you are going to eat it. There is nothing that is more certainly a man’s than what he eats or drinks. Our proverb says, “Possession is nine points of the law;” and I wonder how many points of the law it is when a man has eaten a thing up. There is no legal quibble that can deprive him of that. Whatever suit at law may be brought, there is no possibility of taking away from a man that which he has eaten; and, in like manner, when we have really received Christ by faith, there is no possibility of robbing us of him. “This is my body, which is for you.” Oh, what a blessed doctrine! Lay hold of this great truth, all that there is in Christ is for you. All the fulness of the Godhead is in him, “and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Glory be to his name for this!

The next lesson is, that *his blood has sealed the covenant*. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” I wish I had an hour or two in which I might speak to you about the covenant. It is no use to begin on that great subject in the few minutes we have left. There was a covenant that cursed us,—the covenant of works. There is another covenant that has blessed the elect of God, and shall bless them to all eternity,—the

covenant of grace; and this covenant is signed, and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well; and for its seal it has the blood of God's own Son. Therefore it shall stand fast for ever and ever. So, as you partake of that cup, drink with joy, because it reminds you that God hath made with you "an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." Oh! I am certain that, if you know the music of that word "covenant", you will enjoy coming to the table, even if nothing but that one word shall be brought to your memory.

The third great doctrine that is taught by this supper is that *believers feed on Christ himself*. Sometimes they forget this, and they try to feed on doctrines. They will make as great a mistake as if the Jew, when he went up to the tabernacle, had tried to feed on the curtains, or the altar, or the golden tongs. What did he have for food? Why, the peace-offering! When he drew near to his God, he fed on the sacrifice; and the true food of a believer is Christ Jesus himself. Feed on him, then, beloved. We cannot literally eat his body or drink his blood; we should be worse than cannibals to attempt such a thing. But we can do it, and we must do it, spiritually, by having our hearts and our minds resting upon what Christ is, and what he has done, and so feeding upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have finished when I have mentioned one more lesson which is to be learned from this ordinance. It is clear, from this supper, that *the way to remember Christ is to feed on him again and again*. Is it not a strange thing that, if I have had a great mercy, the way to recollect that mercy is to come to God, and get another mercy? If Christ was ever sweet to my taste, the way to perpetuate that sweetness is to come and taste him again. Dear brethren, do not try to live upon your old experiences. Even the best kind of bread will not keep very long; it soon gets musty if you lay it by. You need to have bread constantly coming fresh from the oven. Even the manna, which came down from heaven, could not be kept, lest

it should breed worms; and it is so with the food for your souls. Do not try to live on mouldy experiences. More than \approx thirty years ago, I had great joy in the Lord when first I knew him. I am very glad that I can recollect it; but that recollection is of little use to me when I get depressed in spirit. No; then I want the Lord to come to me again as he came then. You did come to Jesus Christ, did you not, as a poor, empty sinner, ever so many years ago? Then, come again just in the same style. Come to Christ every day as you came to him the first day. "Oh, but I was only a sinner then!" Well, you are not much more than that now; and you will find it the safest thing to come just as you came at first. "Well, but am I not an experienced saint by this time?" Yes, yes; I daresay you are, but I find that, whenever I have on the fine robe of my experience, I am like the lady at court with a long train. Somebody is sure to tread on it, and then it gets rent. I like to come to Jesus Christ just as I came at first. Suppose that the devil says to me, "You are no child of God." I have often said to him, "You do not know much about that matter, though you know that you are not one yourself." "But," says he, "you do not know the Lord." "Ah, then!" I ask him, "what am I?" He answers, "You are a great black sinner." Then, like Luther, I cut off his head with his own sword, just as David did with Goliath, for I say to him, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and I am going off to the sinners' Saviour, just to trust in him as I did at the first;" and the devil generally departs when I tell him that. There is nothing that is so soul-strengthening as taking another look at the brazen serpent, or having another plunge in the fountain filled with blood, or feeding once again on the inexhaustible provision that is stored up for us in the person of our Lord.

If any of you, who have come to the table of the Lord, have not believed in Christ, never dare to come again while you are in that state.

You have no right here unless you are resting in Jesus, and trusting in him. This is the proof of your being new creatures in Christ Jesus. But if you have the faintest, feeblest faith in Jesus, come and welcome. If you are trusting in your own merits, go to your own table; if you think there will be some merit in your coming to the communion, do not dare to come, for that were to turn the ordinance upside down. You are not to bring something, but to receive something. May you, who do love the Lord, find him to be very precious to you; and may those of you who do not know him, seek him at once, not at the table, but at the mercy-seat and at the cross! Trust in Jesus, for so you shall be saved, and then you shall have the right of entry to the Lord's house, and you shall have the privilege of sitting at his table, and of enjoying every other blessing which is the portion of the chosen family. The Lord make it to be so, for Christ's sake! Amen.