

# THE LORD'S SUPPER

## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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*On a Lord's-day Evening in the Autumn of 1861.*

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

THIS solemn ordinance has been instituted and perpetuated to commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, but there is no ordinance to commemorate his life. One reason for this is, because his death implies his life; when you commemorate his death, you testify that he lived. Another reason is, that the Christian's life, better than any ordinance, is the proof that Christ lived, and the testimony to this world how he lived. A Christian man should so act that worldlings would be constrained to ask, “By what power, by what energy, is he actuated to live in a style so superior to that of his fellows?” The answer he should always be prepared to give is something like this, “I live thus because Christ so lived, and it is no more I who live, but Christ who liveth in me. The love of Christ constraineth me, so that I am sweetly and blessedly compelled to live, not unto myself, but unto him who loved me, and gave himself for me.” The proof that Christ came into the world should be, that his followers are holy. Let their character be blameless and harmless, their conduct so devoted, and so full of self-sacrifice that it shall be

a constant memorial of that Redeemer whose name they profess;—if the mind of Christ be in his people, it will make them so far superior to other men that it must be inferred that some superior energy is in them, and that superior energy is none other than the love of Christ.

They should also so live that, if any ask them how Christ lived, they may be able to say,—not in words, for that might encourage pride, but in effect,—“He lived as I live.” It has been well said that ungodly men do not read the Bible, but they read it as it is translated into the lives of Christians. The actions of believers are, to the worldling, the means of judging what our religion really is. Men of the world do not sit down, and study our creeds; but they trade with us in the common business of life, and if we trade dishonestly, they judge that our creed is wrong, and that our religion is not true. They do not wade through our Bodies of Divinity to balance our arguments, and test their value by the rules of logic; they have a shorter and more practical test than that. If our religion makes us upright in our conduct towards others, and constrains us to fear God in all that we do, then they pronounce our religion to be good; but if, on the contrary, we profess that we believe in Christ, and yet can habituate ourselves to foul and degenerate behaviour, they at once conclude that our religion is a thing of naught. Brethren, I repeat it, that Christ did not institute a memorial of his life because he would have you be the living memorials of himself. He has not left us any ordinance in which his acts, his words, his thoughts can be set forth before the eyes of men in visible signs; he has done better than that, for he has made you to be his signs and ordinances. “Ye are my witnesses,” saith the Lord. If the Spirit of God be in you, ye are the testifiers, to the world, of the holiness and the purity of the character of your Lord.

Our text tells us that the Lord’s supper was instituted by Christ as a memorial of his death. I am going to speak, first, *concerning that of which*

*the ordinance is a memorial, — Christ's death; then, to point out how the ordinance itself shows forth the Lord's death till he come; and then, thirdly, to show how we, in this ordinance, rather than the ordinance itself, — that we, in the ordinance, do show the Lord's death till he come.*

Allow me to observe, however, that the retrospect gives us only one aspect of this ordinance, for it also distinctly holds out a very blessed prospect. We are taught, as often as we celebrate it, to look for our Lord's second coming. Our text contains a very strong and a very lively anticipation of his second advent, and of his personal advent, too. Many persons say that Christ is certainly coming again, but that he is coming spiritually. This way of putting the matter seems to me to be a subterfuge. A man, who is here already, cannot be said to be expected to come; and it is certain that Christ is, at this moment, spiritually present with his people. His own declaration is, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He is never absent, spiritually, from his Church; he still walketh among the golden candlesticks. I cannot see, therefore, how it can be consistent with the ordinary meaning of language to say that he is to come spiritually.

My brother, you believe that Christ is to come spiritually. Suppose that is true, what will be the result? Why, the gospel will be better preached, more sinners will be converted, and may I not also add that the ordinances will be better observed? Do you think that, if Christ should come spiritually into this world, as you say he will, this ordinance would be taken away? "No," I think I hear you say; "certainly not. If Christ shall come spiritually, believers will be more attentive to his commands than they ever have been; they will be still more strictly obedient to his word and will." Just so, but my text says they are to show his death "till he come." That seems to me to infer that, when he comes, the ordinance will be no longer observed. When he is here in person, I

can see adequate reasons why the memorial of his first advent should be dispensed with; but if his second advent be not an absolute reality, I can see neither Scriptural nor logical reasons why this ordinance should cease to be observed at his spiritual coming, whatever that expression may mean.

It is well for us ever to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” There are some, who say that Dr. Watts did not believe this doctrine, but he has expressed it most triumphantly in his paraphrase of Scripture where he writes, —

“Nor doth it yet appear  
How great we must be made;  
But when we see our Saviour here,  
We shall be like our Head.

“A hope so much divine  
May trials well endure,  
May purge our souls from sense and sin,  
As Christ the Lord is pure.”

I. First, I have to try to show you WHAT THE LORD’S SUPPER SETS FORTH; it sets forth “the Lord’s death.”

There is no ordinance to set forth his birth. The Romish Church invented a feast day, and called it Christ-mass, and other churches have imitated the custom; but there is no ordinance, delivered unto us by the Lord Jesus, or his apostles, to commemorate his nativity. Nor do I find, in the Scriptures, any record of an ordinance to commemorate his circumcision, or his first preaching, or his riding in triumph into Jerusalem, or even any ordinance to commemorate his ascension into glory. We generally regard the keeping of the first day of the week as a commemora-

tion of Christ's resurrection, and of his appearance to his disciples, when he showed them his pierced hands, and feet, and side; but even that can scarcely be called an ordinance. So, of all that Christ did or suffered, there is no ordinance enjoined upon us but that which relates to his death. Now, why is this?

It is, first, *because it was for his death that Christ was most despised*; therefore, for his death let him be most honoured. It was the cross of Christ that was his shame; it was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; and it is here that the enemies of Christ always begin their attacks. They deny his Divinity because he died; they mistrust his power to save on the very ground for which we are able to trust to it,—because he died. Usually, the battle against Christ and his Church rages most fiercely around his cross; his adversaries, led by the great master-spirit of evil, all seem to say, “Fight neither with small nor great, save only with that great doctrine of the atonement, for that is as a king in the hosts of Israel.” Those who preach the accursed crusade against Christ have, for their watchword and rallying cry, “Against his cross! Against his cross!” Therefore it is, most blessed Master, that thou hast provided this ordinance to be, as it were, a shield to thine own cross; so that, if every minister should cease to preach thine atoning death, the silent bread and the voiceless wine should, louder than a thousand thunders, tell the world that Jesus died, and that, through his broken body, and his poured-out blood, sinners alone receive eternal life.

Christ's death, too, is chosen for special celebration *because it is the most important part of all that he did or suffered*. We would not depreciate his life, his baptism, his work, or his resurrection, but his death is the centre of all. All the doctrines of the gospel revolve around Christ's death as the planets revolve around the sun. Take away the sun from the solar system, and you have dislocated everything; all the stupendous

wheels must cease to move. Remove thy cross, O Christ, and the keystone of the arch of truth is gone! Take away thy death, O Jesu, and it is death to all that thou hast taught, for all that thou teachest derives life from the fact that thou hast died! O my dear brethren, whatever errors may creep into the Church, they will be important only as they mar the lustre of the cross! I think it is the bounden duty of every Christian to be ready to die for the truth. You know that our forefathers readily gave their lives for the defence of believers' baptism. Still, not in the least depreciating believers' baptism, I say that, if it be worth while for one to die for that, it is worth while for tens of thousands to die, in one tremendous hecatomb, in defence of the fact that Jesus died. As this is the chief point of the adversaries' attack, so must we ever regard it as the most important bastion of defence. Hither, Christian, turn thine eyes the most frequently; here let thy thoughts dwell the most intensely; here lies the source of all thy hopes, here thou shalt find the well-spring of all thy joys. Think it not unimportant, then, that Christ has given to his death so solemn and yet so simple a memorial.

Methinks the Master also appointed this ordinance *because his death is, after all, the most comforting thing in the whole gospel system*. Whither dost thou go, thou of the weeping eye, when thy heart is breaking,—whither dost thou go for comfort but to the place where comfort was not,—namely, to the cross of the dying Saviour? Whither dost thou go, poor breaking heart, when the woes of this life swell and gather till thy soul is nigh to bursting,—whither dost thou go but to that spot where misery reached its climax? It is strange that the masterpiece of misery is also the masterpiece of comfort. The darkest spot in the whole world is yet the source of all our light. The dying of the Saviour gives us life; his wounds heal us; his agonies bring us peace; his tortures yield us ease. The good Shepherd knew that, if his sheep desired to have

green pastures, they would find them at the cross, so he appointed this ordinance to bring them there. Well did he understand that, if they would lie down beside the still waters, they must come to that place where the blood flowed from his blessed brow, and hands, and feet, and side. You have said, with the spouse, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” and he does it in this ordinance. You have sometimes asked him to bring you into his banqueting-house, and that his banner over you might be love; but that banner has never floated from any mast but the cross, and therefore he has brought you there. You have asked that you may sit under his shadow with great delight, and that his fruit may be sweet to your taste. This is his fruit,—his broken body, and his shed blood,—so he brings you here. You have said, “I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof.” Your Lord knows that you cannot do this except you view his cross as that palm tree, springing up in a desert land, and bearing all manner of delightful fruits. You will need no further arguments, brethren, to convince you of the wisdom and tenderness of Christ in bequeathing to you this most comforting ordinance that so his death may be held in perpetual remembrance.

II. Now I go on, in the second place, to show you HOW THE BREAD AND WINE, IN THIS ORDINANCE, SET FORTH THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

You can hardly fail to notice how the ordinance is adapted *universally* to keep in memory the fact it commemorates. You recollect what happened to the woman who looked back after she came out of Sodom. The Lord would have us “Remember Lot’s wife,” so he turned her into a pillar of salt; but that memorial is only to be seen by those who pass that particular spot. Now, suppose that the Master had said to his disciples, “Erect for me a brazen column; let it be in the form of a cross, and write upon it that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;” it would not have appealed to

our observation anything like so forcibly as this ordinance, which is not restricted to any time or place. This memorial has been seen in the darkness of the catacombs of Rome, where only a tiny taper afforded light to the worshipping assembly. This memorial has been seen among the heather on the Scottish hillside, where the lightning flash lent its kindly beam to the minister as he read the Sacred Word. This memorial is seen, to-day, in the far-off isles of the sea. From North to South, from East to West, this is the standing memorial of him who died. Better than storied urn, or animated bust, or marble rare, or metals precious, or jewels unrivalled for their worth, is this blessed memorial, because it can be seen everywhere, in every land.

This is also an admirable memorial seeing that it is *perpetual*. Monuments of brass wear out; the tooth of Time devours the rugged granite itself. Though you build, for a king, a monument like the pyramids of Egypt, yet shall his name be forgotten, and even Pharaoh may lack a wise man to decipher the inscriptions on his tomb, and recount the story of his mighty acts. Not so is it with this blessed ordinance; it can never wear away, it is ever new. I may say to it, “O sacred Eucharist, thou hast the dew of thy youth!” This memorial is as fresh, more than eighteen hundred years after its institution, as it was when, in the upper room, the disciples first celebrated it in anticipation of their Master’s approaching death. So, when centuries have followed centuries, and Time himself shall have become bald, and his scythe shall have lost its edge;—when you sun shall have grown dim with age, and the moon shall be pale with fading weakness;—even then shall this ordinance be as fresh and as new as ever. It is perpetual, because the commandment of our King cannot be repealed; it is never to be set aside till the need of testimony shall have passed away, till Christ himself shall come to reign among men.



And, oh, what a *simple* memorial this is! Priest of Rome, go thou to thy sacristy, and put on thy millinery,—thy red, thy blue, thy silver, thy scarlet, and thy fair white linen;—play the harlot, for such thou art, before the eyes of men in all thy wanton fineries; prove thyself to be the true descendant of her of Babylon by the gaudiness of thine apparel! But know, O priest, that we need none of thine enchantments for the right observance of this ordinance! Ye sons of toil, ye can come here with your garments still covered with the dust of your labour. What need we to fulfil to the letter our dear Master's own injunctions? What but a piece of bread and a cup of wine? Oh, how shamefully have men mimicked this ordinance! How have they invented strange devices to make that appear wonderful which was wonderful enough in itself; because, like everything sublime, it was simple, and majestic in its own simplicity!

This simple ordinance has sometimes made me smile at the useless artifices of the foes of Christ. I have smiled at the thought that our Master has given us a memorial so simple that we can observe it even when our adversaries are most opposed to us. I have broken the memorial bread, and sipped the wine, in Venice, beneath the Austrian sway, where, to have held a public Protestant service would have involved imprisonment; but how could they have stopped us? There were four of us in our own inn; might we not do there as we pleased? No one knew why we wanted a small piece of bread, and a cup of wine; and we four sat around the table, and I avow that it was as much the Lord's supper as it is when thousands of us assemble here to keep the sacred feast. If we were in Rome itself, in a room at the Vatican, though the Pope himself were in the next room, we might observe this blessed ordinance, and he would never know that we had done so unless we chose to tell him. How could he deny us bread? That would be scant hospitality. And how could

he deny us wine? And having bread and wine, we want no altar, and we need no priest. Wherever two or three Christians are met together, there may they celebrate the supper of their Lord. It is as valid without a minister as with one, and just as really the Lord's supper though there be no ordained presbyter or learned Doctor of Divinity to preside at the table. Blessed memorial of the death of Jesus, they cannot put an end to thee! We can laugh to scorn all the priests and the soldiers of Rome. If we had built a memorial pillar, they might have pulled it down. The sons of Moab might have stopped up our wells, and cast down our towers; but who can destroy this simple ordinance? Persecution would no more avail to put an end to the Lord's supper than would the swords of Pharaoh's soldiers have availed to put an end to the plague of flies. The craft or skill of man can never put an end to the simple memorial of bread and wine; all that he can do is but to parody or pervert it.

I think, too, that this is a very *blessed* memorial. The broken bread sets forth the broken body of our Lord; and the wine, being separate from the bread, shows how his blood flowed from his body. The sign itself most touchingly sets forth the refreshing qualities of the blood which flowed from his head, and hands, and feet, and side. The point I want to emphasize is that Christ has instituted a memorial of his death which requires, to carry it out, Christian hearts, and, therefore, hearts full of love to himself and faith in himself. If you wish your name to be remembered, you may say, "It is my desire that men should keep my birthday." So they may; and, in a hundred years' time, the recollection of the fact of your birth will have dwindled down into a mere fable. How many institutions we still have, the origin of which we do not know! But suppose you could have an institution kept up only by those who love you, and suppose, in addition, that you had the power always to preserve in the world some hearts that would love you, what a blessed

memorial that would be! In coming to the table of our Lord, we meet not as a company of men who have no regard for Christ, no constraining love to kindle our passions to a flame. Why, his very name makes our hearts leap for joy!

“Sweeter sounds than music knows  
Charm me in Immanuel’s name.”

His death is, to us, the most delightful topic of meditation. We come not to the table of our Lord as the slaves of Pharaoh were flogged to build the pyramids; but we come cheerfully, joyfully, delighted to remember him, feeling it to be less a duty than a privilege, and far more a pleasure than merely a service. This supper is, virtually, the outward and visible sign of ten thousand times ten thousand broken hearts that have been bound up, tearful eyes that have been made to flash with holy joy, aching consciences that have been eased, and hearts that could sooner cease to beat than cease to love; so it is, indeed, a blessed and choice memorial of our Saviour’s death, which can never be forgotten by his loved ones.

III. Now I come to my last point, and that is, perhaps, the most practical,—HOW YOU AND I ARE TO SHOW OUR REDEEMER’S DEATH IN THIS SUPPER.

Some people are very particular about the way in which the Lord’s supper is administered; but, so long as everything is done decently, and in order, I think that should be enough for us. I was staying, once, with a gentleman,—a Dissenter,—who had become more than a little formal. He was telling me that he had done a great deal of good in his parish, and, among other excellent things, he recounted one, with an air of enthusiasm which made me laugh. He said, “When I came here, these people used to bring the wine for the sacrament in a black bottle; and, as I am sure that I could not celebrate the Lord’s supper if the wine came

from a black bottle, I have provided something better.” I thought it would have been a great deal better if he had asked the people whether they had brought black hearts; for a black bottle does not signify much, but a heart that is not right in the sight of God is the thing that needs to be taken away. If you and I have our hearts right, we need not mind how simple the mode in which the ordinance is administered.

But, now, what are you and I to do in observing this ordinance? We are to show the Lord’s death. Then, if we are to show it, we must show it to somebody. To whom? Why, first, *to ourselves*. My soul, be not thou content unless, in that bread, thou dost discern the Lord’s body for thyself. Do not eat and drink, as the apostle says, “unworthily, not discerning the Lord’s body.” Take heed, O my soul, that thou be not satisfied with eating the bread unless, by faith, thou dost realize that the body of Christ was offered up for thee;—unless thy faith can so participate in the merit of that sacrifice that the eating of the bread becomes to thee a lively picture of thy participation in the results of Christ’s death! Mind, too, that the wine sets forth his blood to you. Brethren, these symbols are but as the veil before the holy of holies; you must look beyond the symbols to that which is within the veil; or else, of what use are the signs to you? The bread is nothing, the wine is nothing; that which the bread sets forth is everything, feed thou on that; that which the wine portrays is everything, see to it that thou art a partaker of that.

What multitudes of professors are quite content with the outward sign! I fear that the Lord’s supper, through being so grossly misused, has deceived many. See how eagerly they send for a clergyman when they lie dying! Men, who have scarcely ever entered a church or chapel in their lives,—men, who fear not God, and have no saving interest in the death of Christ,—desire to have this bread in their mouths at the last. Let them know that, dying impenitent, this bread shall be a swift wit-

ness against them. Not being born of God, and having no right whatever to this ordinance, they ate and drank unworthily, and so ate and drank condemnation to themselves. If any of you have imagined that this ordinance can save your souls, let me correct that error at once; it may ruin them, but it cannot save them. You must get right away to Christ, right away from this ordinance. It is not as unrenewed sinners, but as saints, as Christ's disciples, as his saved ones, that you are to partake of this feast. You must come to Christ first, as a sinner, just as you are. I have read, or heard, sermons which proved that the minister was not at all clear which was Christ,—the bread upon the communion table or the Saviour upon the cross. There is a sermon upon this text: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" in which the preacher invites his hearers to come to the Lord's table. That is the very worst place to which they could come. They must first come to Christ; and then, after they have found acceptance in him, they may come to his table. But they must not be invited to his table until they have come to himself, and trusted in his atoning sacrifice. The Lord's supper is a curse, not a blessing, to unbelievers; so let none of us think of feeding upon Christ in the sign until we have Christ in reality in our hearts.

Next, we are to show Christ's death *to others*. Some of you will be spectators while the rest of us are observing this ordinance. As we shall, in one great host, break bread together, we shall say to you, "We do, each of us, believe that Jesus died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; we have put our confidence in his death as making reconciliation for us before God; we personally avow our own vital faith in him; and we declare to you, whatever may be your judgment concerning him, that he is all our salvation and our desire." The very poorest amongst the communicants will be a preacher. When you, dear friend, take the bread and

the wine, you will preach a sermon. I believe that the word used here has in it, in the Greek, the idea of preaching. You will say, by partaking of this ordinance, “I believe in Jesus Christ, in his broken body, and his poured-out blood.” I hope that will be an appeal to the consciences of you who will be looking on at the ordinance, asking you whether you also believe in Christ; and though the appeal will be a silent one, I pray you to answer “Yes” or “No” to it. As you see us partake of the bread and the wine, think that you hear a voice coming up from the communion table, and saying to each one of you, “Soul, soul, when wilt thou, too, believe in Jesus? When wilt thou cast thyself on him, that he may be thine All-in-all?”

Nor, by this ordinance, do we set forth Christ’s death only to ourselves and to others, but also *to God himself*. We do, as it were, plead the merit of Christ’s broken body and shed blood every time we observe this ordinance. We bring before God,—not a sacrifice, as though the one offering needed to be repeated,—but a memorial of the finished and perfect sacrifice, which was once for all offered for the sins of men. Brethren, it is a solemn thing to think that, every time we come to the communion table, we bring before the Eternal Father the memorial of the death of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son.

We bring that memorial, too, *before the holy angels*, hovering, as they undoubtedly are, over every Christian assembly. We say to each of them, “He who was ‘seen of angels’ is our hope; tell the glad tidings through all the golden streets that the death of Christ is still remembered in this lower world. Speed on your swift wings to heaven, and let it be known in your glorious dwelling-place that there are men and women, saved by the precious blood of Jesus, meeting to commemorate his death.”

And, brethren, in this ordinance we show Christ’s death *even to the*

*devils in hell.* There is nothing which they fear so much as the death of Christ. The breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine are like the flaunting of a victorious banner in the face of the beaten foe. It is the flashing before the eyes of Satan of the sword that smote him in the days of old, and that will make him tremble again even now. Earth and heaven and hell are gathered around us as we meet at the table of our Lord, and we poor puny men become a spectacle unto the three worlds. We are said to be men wondered at, but how much more wonderful is that which is visibly set forth in this ordinance,—the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ!

O my brethren and sisters in Christ, I pray you to see to it that you now show his death to your own conscience. Does it accuse you? Then, show it the wounds of Christ, and it shall be well with you. Does the law condemn you? Show it your bleeding Master, and it will at once absolve you. Show Christ's death to your unbelief; and, surely, it will vanish away. Show Christ's death to your heart; and, surely, it must melt with love to him. Show Christ's death to the weeping eyes of your repentance, and the tears shall be wiped away, and you shall see your pardon bought with blood. Show Christ's death to the weak, Leah-like eyes of your faith, and it shall strengthen them till they shall see even the hidden mystery, and discern the substance which, by mortal eyes, cannot be seen. Show Christ's death to your wretched and miserable spirit, that has been troubled and burdened with the cares of this world; and it must leap for joy, and cast all its burdens away. Show the death of Christ to your old sins, which have been coming back to you to-day; and it will drive them all away. Show Christ's death, in fact, to the eyes of your heart, the eyes of your emotions, the eyes of all your powers of body and soul; and thus you shall be like him who said, "I shall see him," though you shall not need to add, as he did, "but not now;" you may say, "I shall

behold him,” but you will not need to spoil it by adding, as Balaam did, “but not nigh,” for Christ shall bring you into his banqueting-house, and his banner over you shall be love. Sinner, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and remember that he said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Saint, come to the table of your Lord, and feast upon the emblems of his dying love, remembering that blessed are they who believe on him, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told them by the Lord.