

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

F. W. Krummacher

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CHAPTER SIX

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE PASSOVER had been kept, the paschal lamb had been consumed by the guests with feelings of deep emotion, and the festive cup had been several times sent round as was customary. The moment had now arrived when after singing the great "Hallel," or psalm of praise, the meal should be concluded, and the signal given to the guests to rise up and depart. Instead of this, what occurs? The Master, to whom all eyes were directed, rises from His seat - not, as is soon perceived, to leave the room, but - to commence a new and still more solemn act than that of eating the Passover. In the capacity of the head of the family, He again takes the bread, breaks it, and after giving thanks, distributes it to His disciples. He then likewise reaches them the cup, and commands them all to drink of it.

Let us cast a look at the actions with which Our Lord accompanied the words of institution of the Supper.

We read, first, that "**the Lord . . . took bread**" (I Corinthians 11:23). Observe, He took bread, and not the flesh of the paschal lamb. This He did that He might not countenance, in any way, such rude and gross ideas of the ordinance as those expressed by the Jews at Capernaum (John 6:52), and that He might, beforehand, meet the error, as if there were still room in the New Testament for the sacrifices of the Old.

The bread which He took was the unleavened passover cake, which, however, was not subsequently used; for the first Christians, with the apostles at their head, at their communion, which they were wont almost daily to celebrate at the close of their love-feasts, evidently made use of the customary bread; that is, such as was used at table, and therefore leavened.

"**The Lord took bread**" - this most indispensable of all the means of nourishment and sustenance, the product of the most valuable of earth's fruits, which presents, at the same time, such an extremely striking image of Him without whom we have no spiritual life.

But you ask, "Is the bread only an emblem, a figure?" I inquire, in reply, whether you wish to dispute the position, that we must regard the elements of the sacred ordinance, in the first instance, as signs, symbols, and figures?

If so, you must overlook the Lord's words in John 6:51, "**I am the living bread, which came down from heaven, . . . which I give life for the life of the world;**" as well as many other of His expressions of a similar kind. The divine "**corn of wheat,**" which, that it might not remain alone, but bring forth much fruit, fell into the ground, and, by the heat of Gethsemane, and the fire of the Cross, was prepared to become the spiritual food of poor sinners, is reflected, like the sun in the dewdrop, in the sacramental bread, and by the latter is exhibited to our view.

After the Lord had taken bread, He lifted up His eyes toward heaven, and "**gave thanks**" - that is, He poured out His heart in praise and thanksgiving to His heavenly Father.

For what did He render thanks?

O my friends, for what else than for the decision of divine mercy, to save such poor sinners as we, which He saw in spirit, as already accomplished in His blood, and for the deliverance of the children of Adam from the curse of the law, the power of Satan, and the gulf of perdition. It was they who lay continually upon His heart; to whose restoration all His cares and anxieties were directed, and whose exaltation and beatification was the object of His highest interest and sweetest hope. He gave thanks.

O, with what adoring delight will the holy angels have caught this costly incense in their golden censers, and have borne it up to God! He gave thanks. We ought also to give thanks. But it is well for us, that in this, as in everything else, He intercedes for us, and covers our guilt with His obedience, and our deficiencies with His fullness.

However, He did not merely give thanks, but, according to Matthew's expression, He also blessed.

The Saviour pronounced His benediction, not only upon the cup, but also upon the bread. And wherefore? Was it in order to separate the elements from a common and profane use to one that was higher, spiritual, and holy? Doubtless, He had this also in view. But where JESUS, the High Priest, blesses, we ought to think of something more substantial than a mere designation and setting apart of the kind above mentioned. We ought to expect that influence is then exerted, and reality produced. And O, what superabundant richness and fullness of blessing have rested on the bread and wine of the communion from the benediction, which Our Lord pronounced upon them! Since that festal evening, how many thousands have received heavenly refreshment, invigoration, and encouragement by their means!

How many a wounded heart, in the course of eighteen centuries, has been healed, how many fainting spirits revived, and the passage through the dark and mortal vale illumined, alleviated, and sweetened! and how innumerable are those who, till the end of time, will joyfully experience all this! Such is the blessing of the Prince of Peace, which extends even to the bliss of the eternal hills.

After our Lord had given thanks and blessed, He "**broke**" the bread. Nor is this without a deeper meaning, as He Himself declares immediately afterward, in the words, "**This is my body, which is broken for you.**"

Hence the whole of the apostolic statements of the institution of this sacred ordinance do not fail to record this breaking of the bread. JESUS broke it as symbolic of that which should soon occur to His own body, by which He should become our atoning sacrifice and the Bread of life. In the breaking of the bread He depicted His own death to the eyes of the disciples; and the sublime and admirable tranquility with which He did so, again testifies of the infinite love to sinners. which pervaded His heart.

Our Lord presented the bread, thus broken, to His disciples; and it is here that we see Him in His proper office, and favorite vocation. Giving, presenting, and communicating are His delight. As then, so now, His hand is stretched out in His feast of love. We, His servants, retire, as regards ourselves, entirely into the background, while administering the communion. We are then nothing but His instruments. He Himself is always the dispenser and giver.

At the consecration of the cup, the same formula was repeated as at the consecration of the bread. After renewed thanksgiving and blessing, our Lord presented it to His disciples, and invited them all to drink of it. He calls the cup His blood, even as He designated the bread His body; and, both elements united, indicate and represent the whole Christ, inasmuch as He gave His life, which is **“in the blood,”** unto death, as an atoning sacrifice for us.

That the Lord did not select water but the fruit of the vine, for the symbol of His shed blood, was done from the wisest motives, and only enlarges and diversifies the meaning of the selected symbol. Christ is the real vine, and we possess divine life, only in so far as we, like the branches, grow through Him, and are pervaded by His influence. Besides, the cup reminds us of the wine press of torture and agony, in which the Son of God was to become our Saviour and Mediator, while the bread represents His body, offered for the deliverance and blessedness of His believing people.

What an incomparable legacy, therefore, has the Lord left us in His sacred Supper! What a fullness of heavenly blessings and mercies has He showered down upon us in this unpretending institution!

Let us therefore highly estimate this precious bestowment. Let us often avail ourselves of it by repeated and devout approaches to the sacred table for the sanctification and glorification of Our inner man. Only let us be careful to appear in true communion attire - in child-like simplicity and godly poverty of spirit; and on our return from the holy place, we shall feel ourselves constrained to render heartfelt and joyful thanks unto Him, who has bought us with His blood, and be more than ever resolved to live and die to His praise.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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