**Message #1 – The Lord’s Supper (by Steve Nicholes)**

Matthew 26:26-30, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”

The Lord's Supper helps us to remember the meaning of Christ death and the promise of His second coming. It is a reminder that we have entered into a binding covenant with Jesus. The elements of Communion speak of God’s great love for us and are intended to motivate us to complete dedication to Him. Each time we observe we are reminded of God’s redemptive plan, as Israel was reminded of their deliverance from Egypt. We reminded of Christ death and the promise that He will return for His Bride.

Participation in the Lord’s Supper helps us to check our love and devotion to Him in the light of His sacrifice for us.

I shouldn’t have to remind you that external forms and ceremonies are hollow without a genuine spirit of communion with Christ.

The Jewish Passover was a type of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Christ came to earth because it was the appropriate time to introduce God's new covenant with men. Two or three Passovers had come and gone since John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God.” Jesus had spoken again and again of His death and resurrection. His disciples never seemed to understand. After feeding the 5000, Jesus gave specific teaching that should have made them understand. His own flesh would be the “bread” He would give for the life of the World. Yet, they still did not seem to realize what this meant.

Now we come to what Jesus knew would be the last time He would eat the Passover meal with His disciples. How His heart yearned over them. How He wanted to prepare them. How much He longed to draw them to Himself.

The “Upper Room” is a well-known part of Oriental house even today. It is a place of coolness in hot weather, a place of retreat, a place where guests are housed. Thousands of Jews in Jerusalem from all over Palestine, and over the then known world, had come to celebrate the Passover feast. It is expected that anyone having such a room would gladly let it be used for that purpose. These rooms were gratuitously furnished for Passover. Preparations were quickly made in twilight hours.

Matthew 26:20-23 describes the scene, “Now when the even was come, He [Jesus] sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me.”

It was late evening and Jesus and His disciples took their places on the couches at Passover Table. It was custom to sing Psalms 113 and 114, giving thanks before cutting the lamb in pieces for the meal.

During meal Jesus startled the disciples by announcing that one of them would betray Him. He had referred to the betrayal before. In Matthew 17:22, the night after transfiguration, in Matthew 20:18, a short time later, and again in Matthew 26: 6, just two days before the Passover. Now He makes it plain that the betrayer was actually present as one of their own number.

This announcement overwhelmed the disciples with grief and distress. One after another they said, “It surely is not me, is it?” Each one felt Jesus could not possibly mean him. Yet, none of them was so overconfident that he could be absolutely sure he was not the one.

Jesus continues in verses 24-25, “The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.”

Jesus replied that His going to His death, fulfilling God's prophetic written Word. However, the betrayer would not be able to blame God for his decision in betraying Jesus because that was still his own choice. But, alas, for him, it would have been better for him if he had never been born!

When Jesus seeks to stop a person from sinning He does two things:

(1) He confronts a person with his sin. He tries to make a person stop and see and think what they are doing. He says, “Look at what you are contemplating doing, can you really do a thing like that?” It has been said that our greatest security against sin lies in being shocked by it! And again and again, Jesus bids a person pause and look and realize that the person may be shocked into sanity.

(2) He confronts a person with Himself. He bids a person look at Him as if to say, “Can you look at Me, can you meet My eyes, and go out to do the things you purpose doing?”

The appeal of Jesus is to seek to make a person realize the horror of the thing he seeks to do and the love that yearns to stop him doing it. Even so, Jesus warned Judas without pointing a finger directly at him. It was as if Jesus wanted to do everything possible to get Judas to repent. It seems He had already washed his feet along with the feet of the others (John 13:5, 10-11). Thus, He showed Judas consideration and love and then gave him as stern a warning as it was possible to give. He did everything He could to save him. Clearly Judas was not a traitor because God foreknew it but because of his own wicked purpose which caused him to ignore every obstacle that a loving Savior placed in his path.

Matthew 26:26 continues, “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body.”

The Passover was not only a memorial it, also, looked ahead to God's Lamb (to Christ) who is our Passover (1Corinthians 5:7). The Cross fulfilled the typology, thus bringing the old Passover to its end or completion. This was the last one anyone would eat that would have its full significance. Jesus therefore instituted something new to take its place. The symbol changes, as they were no long to remember the Passover in Egypt, but now they were to remember Jesus the complete Passover.

As the Jews observed the Passover, they gave thanks to God for the past and expressed hope for the future. Jesus now took bread and blessed it, gave thanks and praise to God over it. Then He broke it and gave it to His disciples to eat as a memorial, not of deliverance out of Egypt, but rather, of the full deliverance that comes through His broken body. The breaking of the bread pictures His sufferings and death. The eating of the bread pictures the fact that we share in the benefits of that sacrifice which was made once for all for us. From this we get the name “Communion,” or “partaking, sharing, and fellowship.”

The Paschal lamb was extremely symbolic. It was to be:

(1) free from all blemish

(2) shut up for four days for careful scrutiny (Jesus examined by His contemporaries)

(3) killed by those who would be protected by its blood

(4) blood sprinkled on doorposts, and

(5) not to be sprinkled on the threshold - not to be trodden under feet.

Matthew 26:27-28 continues, “And He [Jesus] took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Over the cup Jesus again gave thanks. This “giving of thanks” is an important part of the Lord's Supper. The Lord Supper is sometimes called the “Eucharist,” which means, “giving of thanks.” As Christ gave thanks over the cup, so we give thanks to God for the precious blood that redeemed us. Because Jesus shed His blood on Calvary we all can partake of a full redemption and share in all the blessings and promises of God. His blood is the blood of the New Testament of covenant. That is, the blood that puts God’s “New Covenant” (or “New Will”) into effect according to Hebrews 9:15-18.

The blood of the covenant at Sinai put the Old Covenant of the Law into effect for Israel. By that covenant they entered a special relationship with the Lord as a “Peculiar Treasure,” that is, peculiarly God's own as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. The same thing is promised us through the New Covenant. Thus, in the Body of Christ and through His blood even those who are far off from God can be brought nigh – those who were not a people can become God's people – and those who were strangers, foreigners, and aliens from the common wealth of Israel can become fellow citizens with the saints and are brought right into the family of God (Ephesians 2:12-19) Thus we share in the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and put into effect by Christ's death.

Jesus continues in verse 28, “This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

The words, “for many” reminds us of Isaiah 53:11-12, which states, “He shall see of the travail of his soul . . . [God, the Father, shall see the travail of Jesus’ soul]. . . and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with

the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

The word, “many” does not put any limit on the number to be saved. It simply tells us that though Jesus was one Person He could take the place of many when He died on the Cross. Thus, “many” includes the whole world (John 1:29, “Whosoever will may come.”)

The blood of the covenant brings specifically the remission; forgiveness; pardon; and consolation of our sins. Our guilt is removed and our punishment borne by Him so we will never have to bear it.

Like the broken bread, the “fruit of the vine” is a symbol. It represents the blood shed once for all on Calvary and presented once for all to the Father before Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne. Jesus is not now presenting His blood, He did that once and now the benefits and cleansing are continuously available

Matthew 26:29-30 continues, “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

As Jesus concluded the supper, He drew attention to His coming Kingdom. We partake of the Lord's Supper remembering the past but, also, facing the future. The broken bread speaks of a sacrifice accepted by God – that makes a place for us in His Kingdom. The “fruit of the vine” speaks of a life outpoured, a life that was – and is – eternal and indestructible. That life of Christ in us makes it possible for us to share the blessings of the Kingdom now through the Spirit (1Corinthians.2:9-10). We testify of His death and of His promise to return every time we partake of the Lord's Supper!

The Lord's Supper gives us a privilege of judging ourselves. It is not meant to keep us away from fellowship but rather, to draw us closer to Christ. Seeing Christ on the cross and being reminded of His great love should make us want to abandon all sin and rededicate ourselves to Him whatever the cost.