

What does the Bread and Wine mean to us?

Before we look at our subject proper – “What does the Bread and Wine mean to us?”, there are two apparent problems I would like to mention. The first is that the five accounts of the institution of this feast differ slightly. Why the differences? My theory is that in Jesus’ exhortation he would have repeated himself several times, but in different words, especially as the apostles were “dull of hearing” and obviously did not understand, and they recorded different pieces of his speech.

The second problem is, was it the Passover that Jesus kept. Luke actually says Jesus called it “this Passover” (ch. 22:15). Clearly it was not the Jewish Passover, but a meal like the Passover which, in many ways, prefigured the deliverance through Christ. The morning after this feast in the upper room, was the preparation for the Passover when they killed the sacrificial lambs ready for eating that night. So Jesus did not actually celebrate the Jewish Passover, but instituted a different Passover.

Unfortunately, the orthodox church has added a considerable amount of ritual to the simple service which Jesus introduced: the need for a priest wearing special garments; only the priest being able to offer the prayers and the bread and wine become, literally, Christ’s body and blood as so many believe. So let us read the account in Mark’s Gospel ch. 14 vs. 22-25

It was at the end of the meal that Jesus took bread – it would seem it was just an ordinary piece of bread and it was passed round. Then the cup of wine, which was passed from hand to hand. It was the simplest of ceremonies with absolutely no show, but with profound meaning.

This, of course, is in perfect harmony with the account in 1 Cor. 11 vs. 23-29.

From these two quotations we have the following information:

- (1) The institution of the Supper was made by Christ himself.
- (2) In some sense the bread and wine represented the death of Christ – a death which was “for you”, and was in the nature of a ‘covenant’ sacrifice’.
- (3) To partake of this ‘memorial’ meal was a solemn act of personal dedication, in which the participant examined himself.
- (4) The memorials pointed forward to the time when Jesus will eat and drink anew when he comes in the Kingdom.

History indicates that this solemn, simple service was performed in the first century as laid down by Jesus himself and without his authority it should not be altered. However, about 350 AD, Cyril the, Bishop of Jerusalem, taught that the Holy Spirit descends on the bread and wine at the prayer of the priest and changes them into the actual body and blood of Christ, which became known as the doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’. This is totally opposed to what Jesus taught. We are specifically commanded in Proverbs 30 v 6, “Do not add to his (God’s) words or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar” – they have not only added to God’s word, but taken away part of the symbols in not allowing the laity to have the wine.

In protestant churches the service varies: some high churches follow the Catholic view, others think the priest’s blessing gives the bread and wine spiritual power and virtue, whilst some of the nonconformists still carry it out as in New Testament times; a few others, like the Quakers and Salvation Army, do not include it in their services at all.

(1) Proclaiming the Lord's death.

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

So this service is to remind us of the Lord's death and that our salvation has been made possible by his death, without which we would be without hope as we all sin and forgiveness is only possible through Christ. Let us look at Luke ch. 24 v 46:

"He told them, This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem".

(2) We will now look at the breaking of bread in relation to the Passover.

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

That Jesus referred to the Passover was no accident because at the same time as the Passover lambs were being slain Jesus was slain and so the Passover pointed forward to Jesus.

The Jews had three great annual festivals, the first of which was the Passover, recalling their deliverance from Egypt. Let us read about it in Exodus ch. 12 vs. 21-24.

This festival was a vivid reminder of how the Israelites were delivered from death through the killing of the sacrificial lamb whose blood was sprinkled on the lintel and door posts.

True believers in Jesus have been freed from the slavery of sin, through Jesus, the lamb of God. So, to the Jews, the Passover lamb became the symbol of both national and personal redemption. It was the only sacrifice that required neither priest nor altar and spoke of the sin, burnt and peace offerings all in one sacrifice - the sprinkling of the blood spoke of the sin offering, roasting it with fire of the burnt offering and eating it as a peace offering.

After the exodus, when they kept the Passover they had to make extensive searches to see that there was no leaven in their houses – in whatever form – the leaven, or yeast, being a symbol of sin; they used to search scrupulously with candles to really make sure.

The spiritual counterpart is that before we partake of the bread and wine we must thoroughly search our hearts with the word of Life to expose and eradicate any sin.

Let us read from Luke 22 vs. 13-16 and see how Jesus associates the breaking of bread with the Passover. Luke 22 vs. 13-16

Jesus had "eagerly desired" to eat this Passover. The word "eagerly" indicates 'strongly desirous, keen, impatient', and the Greek for 'desired' means 'a craving or longing for'.

Jesus understood years earlier how he was to undergo this sacrifice; every moment of his life he was struggling to keep under the flesh and prepare himself as that perfect, sacrificial lamb.

We mentioned that the Passover lamb was the only sacrifice not performed by a priest, and the one sacrifice that had the elements of a sin, burnt and peace offering.

(3) Christ as a sin offering.

"The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

The bread and wine indicate, symbolically, a passing from death to eternal life, and our redemption from sins – going right back to the creation when a lamb was slain to cover Adam and Eve’s sin. John Baptist said of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world” (John 1:29) and in his first Epistle the apostle John says, “This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”. So we see that Christ was a sacrifice for our sins and there is no other that can save us eternally from the consequences of our sins.

(4) The Bread of Life

“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33).

At the Passover each had to eat of the sacrificial lamb which, in effect, was a peace offering. In a peace offering they would sit down with the priest, and the roast sacrifice. The animal sacrifice in Leviticus (3:11) is styled the food, or bread, of the sacrifice. At the Passover they sat down and the head of the family acted as the priest, and so was God’s representative – a type of God being present.

Then there was the sacrifice – the bread of God. The sacrifice represented Jesus, the bread of life. Let us look at John ch. 6 vs. 51-58

In these verses Jesus is making reference to himself as the Passover Lamb. The bread represents his flesh and it was the sacrifice of his body that has brought about our salvation. Paul says in Heb. 10:11, “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ”. It is obvious that we do not eat Jesus’ literal body, but the bread is a symbol of it. Just cast your minds back to Jesus’ institution of the feast in the upper room; he passed the bread round, saying, “This is my body”, but he was there, as a person, with them; he did not say, “eat me”, but, “This is –or represents – my body”.

Believers are the ones who eat this sacrificial bread. It was, and is not, the actual eating of Jesus’ literal flesh that gives life, but the conscious assimilation of his life, conveyed through belief and the exercise of his words and actions upon ourselves.

The importance of this memorial service is emphasized by Jesus in v. 53, “UNLESS you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”.

Contrary to church teaching, there are only two essential Christian rituals: baptism, after belief and repentance of sins, and the breaking of bread service. It is totally wrong for the Salvation Army or the Quakers – in spite of all their good works – to neglect this service, likewise for any to add or subtract from it.

The lessons from the Passover meal are important and typify the memorial service. The head of the family, representing God, is replaced by God himself; we are in His presence. The bread, represents Jesus and speaks of all he went through for us. In order to partake of the meal, one had to be a member of the family, and we become members of the family of God by baptism. The gift of God only becomes effective if we do something ourselves, it is to (v. 54) “Whosoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood” – without doing this we cannot have eternal life.

THE BREAD ITSELF

“I am the bread of life”
(John 6:48).

Artos Ordinary Bread

Azumos Unleavened bread

There has been much discussion of what type of bread should be used, wheat or rye, barley or corn. The word Jesus used was ‘ARTOS’ in the Greek and simply refers to the bread of the day. Let us just look at Matt. Ch. 26 and v. 26 and confirm the type of bread Jesus used (MATT. 26:26)

The word Jesus used was ‘artos’ and is the word commonly used for bread. Paul, in Corinthians, uses the same word, “Is not the bread (artos) that we break a participation in the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:16).

The reason for emphasizing this is that some insist that instead of ordinary bread one should use bread which contains no yeast. – unleavened bread. Like the Jewish Matzoh or the Catholic wafer. A different Greek word is used for ‘unleavened’ – ‘azumos’. There is not a single reference in the Bible to unleavened bread – ‘azumos’ – being used at the breaking of bread service in the Bible. The word ‘artos’ is also used to describe cakes, so it seems that any form of bread may be used.

EXAMINATION

“A man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread”
(1 Cor. 11:28).

The word “examine” was a legal term denoting the preliminary gathering of evidence for a judge’s consideration – sometimes they would ‘examine’ by torture as they searched for every bit of evidence. Our own examination is a kind of ‘preliminary judgment’ before the final judgment by Christ. As we examine ourselves - like at the Passover meal – it is done in the presence of God and we find ourselves guilty – miserable failures when compared to the perfect life of Jesus, the bread we partake of. We also seem to be at a ‘T’ junction, as we heard on Sunday; there are two ways
Indicated and we can go right or left.

The bread and wine have a double symbol: they are either bread and wine of blessing or condemnation. Our examination reveals our failures. Let us look at the 1st epistle of John ch. 1 vs. 8-10 and see the paradox of being guilty – worthy of condemnation but by confession to Christ himself (and no one else) believers can be forgiven.

1st John 1 vs. 8-10.

So this personal examination becomes so very important: the plea of guilty, results in forgiveness and acquittal.

Let’s get back to 1 Cor. 11 vs. 28-32 Whilst our guilt is exposed, it is forgiven, as we remember the price Jesus paid in his body for our redemption. 1 Cor. 11 vs. 28-32

We think of his lacerated body after the flogging and the bruises from the punching from the soldiers; his bleeding head from the crown of thorns, the lack of food and sleep. Yet Jesus seemed so cool, calculated and considerate. Those women that wept for him; he told them not to weep for him but for themselves. As he stumbled under the weight of the cross, because no doubt Jesus was not moving fast enough, they made Simon the Cyrenian carry it, but it seems even then Jesus had difficulty in getting to the cross and the soldiers had to drag or carry him, as

the Greek seems to imply.

J.B. Philips renders it, "They got him to a place Golgotha" (Mk. 15:22). They would then have thrown him down on the cross and held him firm while they drove the nails into his hands and feet, then lifting the cross up would have rammed it into a hole – for all to see – and mocked him. Yet, through all this, he could say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

As we ourselves partake of bread and wine, we behold the sinless Son of God, and realize that Jesus died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6) – for us – that by our belief and remembrance of him we are cleansed by his blood and so we have every reason to be glad, as we are reconciled to God.

HOW AND WHEN SHOULD WE BREAK BREAD?

We have seen how Christ instituted it and we endeavour to follow it in principle. It seems in some meetings in the early days, for example at Corinth, before the breaking of bread service, they had a collective meal called the 'love feast'; this became abused, indeed, some even got drunk and the practice ceased. In Acts. Ch. 2 they broke bread daily, but let us read Acts. Ch. 20 v 7, where we see they tended to meet together. Acts 20 v 7.

The first day of the week was Sunday, but the Jewish 'first day' starts on Saturday evening until Sunday evening. Of course, one can break bread any time or day; this is when we are assembled together to especially remember Jesus.

THE FUTURE

"I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God".

This is something we can all look forward to, to being with Jesus personally in the Kingdom which He has so dearly won. Without Jesus sacrifice we remember we would indeed be without hope, but now have an eternal destiny of unending bliss.