

## Good Friday 4-3-15

We call this day Good Friday because it was on this day almost 2000 years ago that Jesus died for us. We have seen the vivid portrayal in films with competing new productions coming out this year. Each is trying to show the version of events that took place from their understanding of the Bible and history. One thing all can agree on is that crucifixion and the preceding scourging was one of the most humiliating and painful methods of execution ever invented by man. It is the source of our word "excruciating."

The Biblical account of the event tells us that Jesus did this for us. We have a debt of sin that requires the death penalty. God sent Jesus to take that penalty for us so that we might have eternal life. It is such an important historical and spiritual event that Jesus told us to remember it by celebrating communion often. The earliest record of the communion meal is actually a rebuke from the Apostle Paul. Would you stand in honor of God's Word as I read it to you? 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The church in Corinth consisted of a great number of slaves. We can come up with lots of excuses for not attending church or getting involved in caring for one another. Imagine if you were a slave. You'd have to beg your master to let you go and spend a morning in worship. He might let you or he might not. He might insist that you had to finish a certain task, causing you to show up late. Early church worship began with what was called a "love feast." The believers ate a meal joyously remembering that Jesus' death had saved them from the punishment they deserved and promised them eternal life.

Those who were free men or women would arrive when they pleased. They ate and drank joyously enough, but not considering the slaves that would come later and who were truly hungry. The meal had become a friendly get together to enjoy life but without the consideration of those in the fellowship that had genuine needs. Some people would even drink in excess. Then when the hungry slaves showed up, the food and wine were gone and nothing was left.

There were also cliques within the church. Those who liked one teacher would sit together and talk about the latest teaching from that group's favorite teacher, while those who preferred another sat in their own group. They did not realize that they had become a part of a spiritual family that should be loving one another. Paul was outspoken about these factions that claimed they were superior to others in the church for one reason or another. He warned them that they aren't really eating the Lord's Supper. They were just eating. Some of these people were not genuine believers. *<sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.* These who are exhibiting the bad behavior and forming factions were showing they were not really genuine. They were humiliating those who had nothing.

The church of Jesus has no class structure. The poor laborer may be the elder overseeing the wealthy aristocrat. It was often the case in the early church. It was truly a classless society. It is what some political theories seek after, but true equality and

genuine concern for others is unattainable without the transformation of the human heart.

Paul goes on to explain the tradition that He received from the Lord. He does not say how he received it, whether through the other Apostles or through a direct revelation. It certainly lines up with what the Gospel writers described. *<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

Jesus' body was broken for us so that we might have access to God. It is a very joyful thing but also very solemn. The author of Hebrews tells us just what it means. <sup>19</sup> *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.* Hebrews 10:19-23 The curtain in the tabernacle and later in the temple that divided off the Holy of Holies where the presence of God resided over the Ark of the Covenant was just a picture of Jesus' body. When that curtain was torn in two at the death of Jesus our way into the presence of God was opened. Before it was only the High Priest who could enter once a year. Now through the sacrifice of Jesus, that is His torn body, we can draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. That is because we have been made holy by Jesus' death for our sins.

When the believers took this lightly, they weren't recognizing the seriousness of what was portrayed in communion. They weren't remembering the high price paid for their sins. They weren't letting the sacrifice Jesus made for them cause them to sacrifice for others. When they broke their bread they weren't thinking of the body of Christ broken for them, nor were they thinking of how they, as a representation of the body of Christ, weren't considering the rest of the believers who could not arrive as early as they did.

*<sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* They were not thinking of the precious sinless blood of Jesus that was poured out for their sins, instead of their own blood. That is what they were to remember. That is one reason that over time communion took on more and more formality and lost some of the joyful atmosphere that it had in the beginning. We should not only remember the cost, but also our gain.

The word "new" in "new covenant" this verse is the Greek word for new in quality (*kainos*) as opposed to simply new in time. The old covenant was based on what we do, promising blessing on those who kept the laws of God. It never saved anyone. Salvation was always by faith in God. The sacrifices only looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice. This new covenant was completely different in that it provided a way of

salvation through faith and was sealed by the very blood that made it possible. It is new in the sense that it is the fullness to which all the covenants of God looked toward. It is also new in its eternal significance and immutability.

*<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.* Communion is to remember with joy that we have entered a new covenant made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. We have access to God. We are made clean in the eyes of God. We should always take communion joyfully but also reverently with Jesus' sacrifice in mind.

The church in Corinth was being judged with afflictions and even death because they were taking communion greedily without considering one another or what it truly signified. We are a family. We wait on one another. We are all equal in the eyes of God because of what Jesus has done for us. Each of us is precious in His sight. You might have friends that you have more in common with, but this is a family. There is the expression "blood is thicker than water," meaning family is most important. Well, we are one by the blood of Jesus whose side poured out both blood and water, making us one family in Him. The original meaning of that proverb applies as well. It meant that the one I had made a blood covenant with I'm more obligated to than one with whom I shared the womb. Our covenant in Jesus' blood makes us even closer than relatives.

In the chapter before this passage, Paul wrote, *<sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.* 1 Corinthians 10:17 It is our faith in the same Lord that saved each of us by the same means that makes us one family in Him. As we partake of communion together let us remember that it is reminding us of why we have access to God. It reminds us that we are one in Christ. It reminds us that we are to love one another and consider ourselves brothers and sisters in Christ. All this was made possible because that Friday 2000 years ago was truly good. God willingly expressed His love for us in paying our sin debt at great cost to Himself. We couldn't be more loved than that.

Let us celebrate together the fact that the bread and juice represents the price of our ransom, our redemption, our salvation, and access to God. We take it joyfully and reverently considering the great price that was paid in love. We check our hearts to see that we are learning from Jesus' example and obeying His command to love one another.