

On the Way to the Cross - The Last Supper

Matthew 26:26-28, *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

We are coming to the end of our journey with Jesus (on the way to the cross). This morning we are going to examine the Last Supper. Records of events that took place during the Last Supper differ considerably among four Gospels (the washing of feet, arguments among apostles, the institution of Lord's Supper, etc.). I believe that the order of these events is important. For instance, how do we determine whether Judas was present when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper? Also, whether the dispute occurred before or after the washing of feet. So what is the exact order of these events during the Last Supper?

Before we answer that let's address the matter of Judas Iscariot. In Mark 14 Jesus predicts that one of the twelve will betray Him. Jesus does not point out who the traitor is. Mark does not make it clear whether Judas was present when the Lord's Supper is instituted by Jesus, or not. After supper, the apostles go to Mount of Olives, singing a hymn. And before reaching Gethsemane, Jesus predicts Peter's denial.

Matthew is more specific (Matthew 26). Judas asks *"Surely not I, Rabbi?"* and Jesus replies, *"You have said it."* Again, Matthew does not make it clear whether Judas was present when Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. After the dinner, the disciples go to Mount of Olives and on the road Jesus predicts Peter's denial (not earlier).

In Luke 22 we get a slightly different account. After the Lord's Supper is instituted, Jesus predicts one of them will betray him, but Luke does not mention the exchange between Judas and Jesus. Luke further writes (verse 24) *"A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest."* But Jesus resolves it by saying, *"On the contrary, the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves."*

Finally, in John 13 we are told that Jesus washes disciples feet and then predicts that one of them will betray Him. John skips the institution of the Lord's Supper. However, before the meal ends Jesus gives His disciples a new commandment to love one another and also predicts Peter's denial. After supper, Jesus explains that He is leaving to **"prepare a place."** Next, He promises to send the Holy Spirit who will be with them forever. Jesus then delivers His last discourse to His disciples (probably lasting an hour), in which Jesus says (1) **"I am the true vine,"** (2) **the world will hate them,** (3) **the Spirit will guide them to all truth,** (4) **after He leaves, their pain will turn into joy,** (5) **He is going to the Father.** After that, John records Jesus' first prayer for His disciples. Jesus prays for the Father to protect them; that they may be one so that the world will know that Father has loved them - including those who will believe their words (John 17).

So what order did these events occur?

- (1) The Dispute: This dispute among the disciples is likely to have taken place in the absence of Jesus. Peter and John were sent ahead to prepare for the Passover in the upper room or guest chamber. Jesus and the twelve came in later that evening. A dispute may have arisen among the disciples while Jesus was talking to the host.

As far as we know, Judas is present.

- (2) The Washing of the Feet: The main purpose is to teach the disciples to serve one another, instead of arguing about who is the greatest. Earlier Mary (Martha's sister) had visited Jesus at Simon the leaper's home and poured a very expensive jar of perfume over the Lord's head, and this event may have triggered the dispute because she was given such a high profile. Again, Judas is present.
- (1) Christ's Betrayal Foretold: During the meal, while they sat and ate, Jesus predicts that Judas will betray Him. When Judas asks, "Is it me?" Jesus replies, "You have said it." Later, He encourages Judas to do quickly what he intended to do, and Judas leaves the upper room.
- (1) The Lord's Supper: Finally, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper. They were eating bread and drinking wine throughout the meal. Therefore, Jesus is likely to have started this ceremony with the wine cup, and everyone drank from the same cup. That was then followed by His breaking of a loaf of bread, and giving it to each person present. Luke says Jesus took a cup, blessed it and gave it to the disciples, saying, "***This is my blood,***" and then broke bread. In Mark and Matthew, this sequence is reversed. Mark says, "***And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat, this is My body'. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them: and they all drank from it.***"

Now that we know the sequence of events, is it possible to determine whether Judas was present at the Last Supper. It is my opinion that he was there at the beginning and that Jesus sent him on his way to do what he had in his heart to do. Significantly this was before He broke the bread and gave it to His disciples saying, "*This is My Body.*" Judas never received the body and blood of Christ because of his treachery.

With this knowledge and understanding of the sequence of events, can we now envisage ourselves being physically present at the Last Supper and personally sharing the elements with our Lord Jesus. This is what I'd like us to do today. We ought to take this ceremony very seriously as it has deep significance to our faith and doctrine.

Listen intently to Jesus' own words as He institutes the Lord's Supper: Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me.*" And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" He answered and said to them, "*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.*" And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "*Take, eat; this is My body.*" Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "*This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.*" And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

There is an element of the Lord's Supper that is often overlooked, an element which is referred to as the "**lifting up of the hearts.**" This element is common among most Christian traditions. The "Sursum Corda" (Latin for "Lift up your hearts") is the opening dialogue to the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer in the liturgies of the Christian Church, dating back to at least the third century. The dialogue is recorded in the earliest liturgies (worship ceremonies), and is found in all ancient rites.

The phrase "Sursum Corda" is generally translated as "lift up your hearts", but the Greek version Ἄνω σχῶμεν

τὰς καρδίας means **"Let us lift up the hearts"**, implying "our hearts." Though the detail varies slightly from rite to rite, the structure of the dialogue is generally threefold, comprising (1) an exchange of formal greeting between priest and people, (2) an invitation to **lift the heart to God**, and (3) an invitation to give thanks. But note, "Lifting up our hearts" does not mean 'feel uplifted'. It means that, by faith, we are lifted up into the presence of Christ in heaven itself!

At the Lord's Supper, what we are declaring by the "lifting up of hearts" is that we are being lifted up into the presence of Christ Himself - by faith. The significance of this approach when partaking of the Lord's Supper is very clear. Christ is not physically present in the elements down here on earth, because He is present "down here" only by the Holy Spirit. However, spiritually (and by faith) the Holy Spirit lifts us up to where Christ is, there in heaven. Hence, by faith, Christ is present physically at the Lord's Supper.

This view says that He is not present in the elements, and He is not present down here except by the Spirit. Instead, Christ lifts us up by the Holy Spirit (through our faith), so that we can be present where He is! Hence, the physical presence of the Lord is with us whenever we "lift up our hearts" and then partake of communion. Notice how, every time we share in the Lord's Supper, and we lift our hearts up to Christ, the Holy Spirit lifts us up into the physical presence of Jesus Christ in heaven. Him in us and us in Him!

The **lifting up of hearts** is like the lifting up of the wine cup. The cup symbolises the heart, and wine represents the blood (which denotes life). Every time we *lift up our hearts*, we are in fact lifting up our lives in total surrender to our Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, we are lifted up by the Holy Spirit into the very presence of God! Then, while in His presence, we are able to partake in the elements of the Lord's Supper.

Now, let's have Holy Communion....

During the course of their meal, having taken and blessed the bread, He broke it and gave it to them. Then He said, "Take, this is my body." Taking the chalice, He gave it to them, thanking God, and they all drank from it. Then He said, "This is my blood, God's new covenant, poured out for many people. I'll not be drinking wine again until the new day when I drink it in the kingdom of God."

On the evening of His betrayal Jesus vowed to stay away from the "fruit of the vine". He wouldn't touch it until the kingdom of God had fully come. That kingdom would not come in its "fullness" until Jesus' return on the clouds. On that last day, God's kingdom shall be there in all its fullness, and then, Christ shall "drink the wine on the new day in the kingdom of God." Of that drinking, we read in Revelation 19; on the last day will come "the marriage supper of the Lamb" when Christ and His people will enjoy together the blessings of the final Promised Land - Paradise Restored.

Christ today does not drink from the fruit of the vine. We, meanwhile, will shortly be sitting at the table of the Lord to eat bread and to drink of the fruit of the vine. We do drink the wine. So why is this? **"In remembrance of Him"** (1 Corinthians 11:25). As we drink the wine, we remember today not only the blood of Christ poured out on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins; we remember also that Jesus Christ has entered Paradise Restored (and He is waiting for the permanent return of His people). As we do this, we must exercise our faith and lift up our hearts!

Thereafter, even though Jesus does not drink the wine with us, He still blesses it and gives us the chalice to drink from. Notice, until there is no need to drink His blood (the wine) Jesus asks us to remember Him. After that, when the *new day* in the kingdom has fully come, Jesus will join us and drink to a paradise restored! Hallelujah!

Have you come to His table today? Have you lifted up your heart today? Are you listening intently to His words today?

Remember, the Lord loves to serve you in person!