

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, October 23, 2011 – 11:00
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Cups of Remembrance - Matthew 26:17-30

Introduction: Our choir just beautifully sang a song called “Remember” and that is very apropos for this morning’s message. Today, we are called upon to remember.

Now, I know that our memories can be a subject we make jokes about – especially as we get older, but the fact is, being forgetful is not just associated with old age. We all forget names, phone numbers, and appointments, birthdays and anniversaries. We forget our homework. We forget to take out the garbage, to check the oil, to pay the bills - you name it, and we’ll forget it!

We are all prone to forget, so Jesus wants to make sure that He doesn’t become a forgotten name in a book. This morning, I want to point you to an occasion in which Jesus told His disciples to remember Him. Not in a sentimental or nostalgic way, but to remember who He is and what He was about to do for them.

You see, Jesus knows a thing or two about human memory. He knows that we are prone to forget. So in a much broader sense, in this passage, He is telling every Christian to not forget Him. He’s telling every one of us to remember Him always. So that’s what we’re doing this morning. We’ve already remembered Him by singing about Him. We’re going to remember Him through this message, and in a few minutes, we’re going to remember Him by partaking of the Lord’s Supper. But for now, let us turn to Matthew 26:17-30 and let’s take a closer look at the Lord’s Supper. I won’t read it all now, but we’ll break this passage down as we go and talk about each section.

Now let me share with you a little background here. Vs. 17 mentions The Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the Jewish celebration in which this first Lord’s Supper came about. You see, the Jewish calendar was full of feast days and celebrations but the most important was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was so important to the Jews, that it was one of only three feasts where they were required to go to Jerusalem to celebrate. Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread actually included three feasts that were rolled into one. First was Passover. Then there was the actual Feast of Unleavened Bread that lasted 7 days. Then, it culminated with the Feast of Firstfruits. Over time, all three together came to be known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But the key event was the Passover.

The Passover was a celebration and remembrance of the time when God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. This is what Jesus was celebrating this night with the disciples. They were doing exactly what God had commanded the Jews to do.

Even though the ceremony was simple, it required some preparation. Since the Jews were required to take the Passover in Jerusalem, there were more than a million more of them in town at this time. That made finding a place to hold it a chore. But we see from our passage, that Jesus had already taken care of that. He had already picked out the lamb and the place. All that was left to do now was the actual sacrifice of the lamb and the actual preparation of the meal. This took several hours, because there were so many people crowded into the Jerusalem, and they all were doing the same thing. Each family would have to take a lamb to the temple to be sacrificed. So you can imagine how much time that would take for the temple priests to perform all those sacrifices. Anyway, after the lamb was sacrificed, then it could be taken back to the place of the Passover celebration, the meat would be roasted.

Now in the meantime, the rest of the food was being prepared including the baking of the bread for the meal. All of this was part of the preparation. And as Jesus and the disciples gathered there in the upper room, Jesus made the final preparations. He began by pouring the first of four cups.

1. The Cup of Preparation

17 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

18 He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'"

*19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. **Matthew 26:17-19 (NIV)***

The Passover meal was structured around sharing of four cups of wine. The host would pour those four cups at different intervals throughout the ceremony. John MacArthur writes: *“The four cups of wine served during the meal symbolized God’s four promises to His ancient people just before their deliverance from Egypt: Exodus 6:6-7 (NIV) 6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.’”* (MacArthur, John: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew pg. 141)

That is what the four cups symbolized during the Passover, but Jesus meant for the cups to symbolize something else. As Jesus poured and blessed the first cup, He was signifying not only that all the preparations had been made for the meal, but more importantly the preparations were being made for His Father’s plan of redemption. And that plan would be complete in the next few days as Jesus would die, be buried, and rise again.

In Luke’s account of this event, he records that Jesus said, *“This do in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19). The reason that we celebrate the Lord’s Supper is because Jesus commanded us to. He didn’t tell us how often, but He did say that as often as we do, we are to do it in remembrance of Him. Even though we celebrate the Lord’s Supper once every three months, remembrance requires that our preparation be continual. Just like He did with the disciples, Jesus has provided the place. He has provided the Lamb. He has provided the blood sacrifice. But we have to be prepared by willingly entering into His fellowship. How do we do that? We enter into His fellowship by coming to know Him as our Lord and Savior - By accepting His gift of salvation He’s provided - By regularly gathering with each other for worship and being an active part of His body—the church – and by continually partaking of all He’s graciously prepared for us. In order to remember what Jesus has done for us, we have to be prepared. Then, we can share the first cup with Him—the cup of preparation. After we’ve shared the first cup with Him, then comes the second cup:

The Cup of Purging

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

21 And while they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord?”

23 Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.

24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

Matthew 26:20-25 (NIV)

Once Jesus shared the first cup with the disciples, bitter herbs were introduced to the meal. The bitter herbs represented the bitter bondage that Israel experienced while they were slaves in Egypt. It didn’t begin that way for them though. When Joseph saved them from starvation and they were allowed to live and prosper and grow in the land of Goshen, they enjoyed a peaceful life. But over time, that life became a nightmare as a cruel and intimidated Pharaoh came to power and made their lives miserable. The bitter herbs reminded them of that oppression. They reminded them of the bitter tears they shed as they cried out to God. They reminded them of the struggle they were under just trying to survive under the rule of the most powerful nation of the day. How could a bunch of slaves stand up against that? They were shepherds, not warriors so they couldn’t. They were in bondage and couldn’t do anything about it. You might say they had no hope.

You may find yourself here this morning thinking you are without any hope. If you’ve never trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, that is how you are. Because we’re all born with a sin nature, we’re all born with a natural bent toward sin and rebellion against God. And at every opportunity, we’re prone to sin against a holy God. And the more we sin, the deeper into bondage we become. And the worst part is that we can’t do anything about being free from that bondage of sin. We’re just not equipped. In bondage to our sin nature, there is no hope.

But then comes the second cup. After the second cup, the host of the Passover would break bread and dip it in the bitter herbs. Because the bread was unleavened, it represented sinlessness and purity. Now get the picture...By dipping the unleavened bread into the bitter herbs, sinlessness and purity took on the bitterness of sin and bondage. Here is what that means.

As Jesus sat with His disciples, there was sin in their midst. Luke tells us that Satan had literally possessed Judas prior to the meal when he agreed with the chief priests and scribes to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that, and He graciously presented Judas with a chance to repent. But when he would not, Jesus knew that He could not continue with the meal until He had purged the sin in their midst. So He first exposed it. He identified His betrayer and exposed the sin. And then He got rid of it.

In John's account, Jesus told Judas, "*What you are about to do, do quickly.*" **John 13:27 (NIV)** He told him to leave. He exposed sin and bitterness in their midst and He got rid of it. In the same way, remembrance of Jesus requires us to expose the sin that binds us. In other words, see it for what it is. Stop making excuses for it. Quit trying to rationalize it. Stop comparing it to other people. Expose it by confessing it. Confession means seeing sin the same way that God does. And He sees sin as an insult to His holiness. It's so insulting, it's inexcusable and worthy of death.

That is the Cup of Purging and then after that, the Lamb is served. And with the Lamb comes the third cup:
The Cup of Partaking.

26 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."*

27 *Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."*

28 *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* **Matthew 26:26-28 (NIV)**

When Israel was helplessly in bitter bondage in Egypt, they had no way of escape. Pharaoh seemed to hold the power of life and death in his hands. But he really didn't. God is the only One who holds the power of life and death. And He showed that in a mighty way. When Pharaoh refused to submit to God and free His children from their bondage, God sent plagues, and each subsequent plague was worse than the previous. And with each plague, Pharaoh became more and more stubborn until God broke him with a final plague. With that plague, He promised to take the life of every firstborn son in Egypt. But even as He made that promise of judgment, He offered grace. He promised that each household's children would be saved if they provided a substitute. As the angel of death was passing from house to house, if the blood of an innocent lamb was seen on the doorpost of the house, that house would be spared and the firstborn child would live. If the blood was not present, the firstborn would die.

That night, Pharaoh's son died. But the Israelite children were saved. All who applied the blood were saved. Each child that was saved was saved by the blood of a lamb. As Jesus and the disciples were there in the upper room eating their lamb, they were doing so in remembrance of that time.

But Jesus was also showing them that from this night forward, He was instituting a new tradition. As they moved from eating the Passover lamb, He pointed to Himself as the ultimate Passover lamb. As He did, He instituted this ordinance of remembrance we still practice today by participating in the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper, we remember His body that was broken. We remember His blood that was shed. We are reminded that as we place our faith and trust in Christ, He applies His blood to the doorpost of our hearts, and the death angel will pass over us. We remember that His blood will break the bonds of sin in our lives and make us free forever. That is what we remember when we partake of the Lord's Supper. And as Jesus instituted it with His disciples, He sealed it with the third Cup of Partaking of His blood. But that was only three cups. There was one more cup:

The Cup of Promise.

29 *I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."*

30 *When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* **Matthew 26:29-30 (NIV)**

What Jesus said in vs. 29 broke tradition. Traditionally, there were four cups served at Passover, and the fourth cup was taken by the Jews as a celebration of the coming kingdom. But in vs. 29, look at what Jesus said: "*I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.*" (29). In other words, Jesus said, "*That's it men. I know you're expecting a fourth cup, but we're not going to have it now because we're going to wait and share it in the Kingdom to come.*" Jesus was saying that Heaven is not now because I've got more work to do. Of course we know that within just a few hours, He would be dying on a cross with a sign over His head that mockingly proclaimed Him as the "*King of the Jews.*"

It may have been hung there mockingly, but it was true. By His death, Jesus' work on the cross was providing for our salvation and sealing the promise of the Kingdom.

Those words had to be shocking to the disciples, but John records the comforting words Jesus gave His disciples there in the upper room before they sang their hymn and left for the Mount of Olives. Those words are recorded in **John 14:1-3 (KJV)**, He said, "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*"

Conclusion: Why do we remember? Because Jesus told us to. We remember because Jesus is soon coming back. He is preparing a place for you now, but are you ready to receive it? Are you continually **preparing** your life for His return? Are you continually **purging** sin from your life, getting ready for His return? Are you continually **partaking** of His grace, looking for His return? Are you continually looking for the **promise** of His return? If not, I urge you to get prepared. Don't wait for a more convenient time. The time is now and today is the day of salvation. Jesus has prepared everything for you. Would you prepare yourself for His coming by giving your life to Him?