

by Naomi Fonville

LESSON 1

Remembering the Words of Jesus

MATTHEW 26:26-30; MARK 14:22-26; LUKE 22:16-20; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29

The New Testament guides us in how to worship as the Lord's church. Our worship must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The Lord's Supper was specifically commanded and was instituted in the time of the Jewish feast of Passover. Jesus took the unleavened bread (representing His broken body) and the fruit of the vine (for His blood) and said, "This do in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24 KJV). Later, when the church was established, we read that Christians "continued steadfastly" in the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42).

We know that the Lord's Supper is to be observed on the first day of the week, as directed in Acts 20:7. Everett Ferguson once wrote, "There should be no Lord's Day without the Lord's Supper; and no Lord's Supper without the Lord's Day."

We also know that this act of worship should be entered into reverently, for we are warned about taking the Lord's Supper unworthily or "in an unworthy manner" (1 Corinthians 11:27-30 NKJV). So, being aware of the seriousness of what we are doing, it behooves us to study deeper into its purpose and how we may be more pleasing to God by our participation.

One avenue I have found to be helpful in focusing on this part of our worship is to meditate on those terrible hours Jesus spent before His death. We also need to study His words from the cross. In the following lessons, we will examine these words more closely.

Jesus had already gone through the agony and mocking that included Judas' betrayal followed by appearances before Caiaphas, the high priest, and then Pilate, the Roman governor. Finally, Pilate handed Him over to be crucified. Carrying His cross, He was led out to the place called Calvary, where they crucified Him (Luke 23:33; Mark 15:25).

As we meditate during this act of worship, it is helpful to look at these events from several perspectives. Looking backward, we remember His suffering, and we mourn. But considering the justification it provides for us, we also rejoice.

Looking inward, we are allowed a time of repentance, renewal, and recommitment to Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:28-29). In our self-examination, we question if we are true to our promise. Have we truly made Christ the Lord and Master of our lives? We also look forward, as this observance is a proclamation of His death until He comes. We remember the Lord's promise to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

Finally, we look outward as we are joined by those of like precious faith, for the Lord's Supper is a communion with Christ and one another. Tillet S. Teddlie expressed this truth in the hymn "The Lord's Supper" in which he wrote, "Hearts are brought in closer union while partaking of the bread."

All these things should be considered as we seriously review the words of Jesus from the cross. That great sacrifice was the price He paid for our redemption (Galatians 3:13; Revelation 5:9).

QUESTIONS

1. The Lord's Supper was instituted during the observance of the Passover. Review the history of this feast found in Exodus 12:1-27.
2. Why was it so timely that Jesus should have been sacrificed during this week (John 1:29)?
3. Knowing that His purpose through the ages had been to die for the sins of mankind, what might Jesus have been thinking when He prayed, "Let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39)?
4. What did Pilate conclude after examining Jesus (Matthew 27:24; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:14-15)? Why is this important?
5. Read again Matthew's account of the supper. What was the significance of the bread and the cup?
6. According to Matthew 26:29, who will commune with us when we enter the Father's kingdom?
7. What does it mean to partake of the communion in an unworthy manner? Are we ever "worthy" of the Lord's sacrifice?
8. From what perspectives should we look and meditate as we take the Lord's Supper?
9. What scriptural evidence is there for partaking of the Lord's Supper on Sunday? (See Acts 20:7). How often did Christians come together according to 1 Corinthians 16:2?
10. What hymns help you focus on the Lord's Supper in a meaningful way?

LESSON 2

“Father, Forgive Them”

LUKE 23:34; ACTS 3:17

Luke recorded these words of Jesus, spoken from the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 KJV). The Greek tense of the Greek verb for “forgive,” used in this request, indicates a continuous action, as if Jesus kept on saying this. Perhaps He said it regarding the centurion when the nails were driven into His hands and when He was put on the cross. It may be that He kept saying it even to the jeering mob and to the soldiers who cast lots for His garments.

Likely the crowds who gathered around a crucifixion scene often heard cursing and shouting from the victims hanging on crosses. It must have been unusual, indeed, for those near the cross of Jesus to hear His prayer. Some may have recalled His earlier teaching from the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemies ... do good to them that hate you” (Matthew 5:44).

Christ asked for forgiveness for all of those involved, but their guilt was not overlooked. Their pardon required repentance and obedience, and it was accepted by many on Pentecost, when they asked Peter, “Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? Some 3,000 souls were baptized that day for the remission of their sins (vv. 38, 41). Later, Peter told some of his hearers, “I know that you did it in ignorance” (Acts 3:17 NKJV). Yet their ignorance did not absolve them of guilt.

Stephen, a servant in the early church, was said to be “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5; 7:55). Like Peter, he also preached a powerful sermon, calling his hearers “betrayers and murderers” of the Just One (v. 52). But those listeners, rather than asking what they could do to be saved, stoned him to death. Before he died, Stephen uttered a similar cry to that of Jesus on the cross: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (v. 60).

As we look at Jesus’ great willingness to forgive the sins of those who were putting Him to death, we must consider our own sins and realize that our pardon is conditional. It was our sins, also, that nailed Him to the cross. Like those on Pentecost, we are required to repent and to confess the name of Christ (Romans 10:10). Like them, we must be baptized into His death in order to be raised to newness of life (6:3-7). When we conform to this act of obedience, we are forgiven by God and can begin to live a new life in Christ (Galatians 2:20; 3:27). It is because of God’s goodness and the great sacrifice of His Son on the cross that we have hope (Romans 8:24), provided that we endure to the end (Revelation 2:10).

In looking at the Lord’s example of forgiveness, we must remember to keep ourselves ready to forgive others when they sin against us (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). Someone has

said that if we refuse to forgive others, we destroy the bridge over which we ourselves must pass.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the Greek tense of “forgive” indicate about Jesus’ request from the cross?
2. For whom do you think Jesus was praying?
3. Did Jesus’ request for forgiveness absolve His executioners of their guilt? What was required of them on the Day of Pentecost?
4. According to Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16, what is required of us?
5. We often hear the saying “Ignorance is bliss.” Is ignorance a valid reason to expect God’s pardon? Why, or why not?
6. Under the Law of Moses, if a person sinned in ignorance, what was the consequence (Leviticus 5:17)? Why were they guilty?
7. What emphasis did Jesus place on repentance in Luke 13:1-5?
8. What did Jesus teach about forgiveness in Matthew 6:12, 14-15?
9. Read Mark 2:7 and Luke 17:3. Are these verses contradictory? Explain.
10. What must we always be willing to do according to Mark 11:25-26 and Colossians 3:12-13?

LESSON 3

“Today Shalt Thou Be with Me in Paradise”

MATTHEW 27:38-44; MARK 15:27-32; LUKE 23:39-43

Many prophecies from the Old Testament foretold the sufferings and eventual death of the Lord. One of these is recorded in Isaiah 53:12, where the prophet said that Christ will be “numbered with the transgressors” (KJV). Jesus quoted this prophecy regarding Himself before His betrayal (Luke 22:37).

The prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was placed on a cross between two thieves. Both Matthew and Mark wrote that some of those passing by wagged their heads and mocked Jesus, challenging Him to come down from the cross. Even the robbers joined in the accusations. John mentioned only that Jesus was placed between two others (John 19:18).

Luke 23 records that one of the malefactors said to Jesus, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (v. 39). But the other rebuked him and said, “This man has done nothing amiss” (v. 41). Then he said to the Lord, “Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (v. 42). Jesus replied, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (v. 43). One thief simply requested that Jesus deliver them from the cross. The penitent thief, however, was thinking of salvation later on. This statement of Jesus was one of His last before the terrible darkness (v. 44).

That thief lived and died (as did Jesus) under the old Mosaic Law. Some point out that it is entirely possible this man heard and obeyed the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness. Mark said that John “did baptize ... and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” and that “there went out unto him all the land of Judea ... and were all baptized” (Mark 1:4-5). Whether the man had previously been baptized, however, is immaterial. The church and its terms of pardon had not yet been established, and Jesus had already pointed out that He had power on earth to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).

It is interesting to note that the thief was promised that he would be, that very day, with Jesus in Paradise. It is commonly understood that Jesus did not go immediately to heaven because, after His resurrection, He told Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father” (John 20:17). Other translations clarify that Jesus was telling her not to cling to Him or hold on to Him; He would continue to meet with His followers a little longer.

The offer of Jesus to the thief was an act of unmerited favor. His offer to those of us who are living in the Christian Era is also unmerited. We do not deserve salvation, but Jesus’ death has made it possible. We cannot earn it; it is, nevertheless, conditional as Jesus would later emphasize. After His resurrection, Christ commissioned His apostles to go and preach the gospel (the good news of His death,

burial, and resurrection, according to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) to every creature, promising that those who believe and are baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

QUESTIONS

1. The subject of Isaiah 53 is God’s “Suffering Servant.” List some specific prophecies in Isaiah 53 that foretell the suffering of Christ.
2. What was the real motive behind those who sought Jesus’ death (Matthew 27:18)?
3. Jesus predicted the manner in which He would die in Luke 22:37. Where is this found in Isaiah 53?
4. The same verse in Isaiah 53 says that God’s servant would make intercession for the transgressors. In what ways did Jesus fulfill this prophecy?
5. Contrast the statements by both thieves on the cross. Why was only one offered salvation when both asked to be saved?
6. Some claim that the thief on the cross demonstrates that “only faith” is needed for salvation. How would you answer this?
7. According to Jesus, what is required of “every creature” today in order to be saved (Mark 16:15-16)?
8. Are some sinners less deserving of salvation than others? See Romans 3:23.
9. What is the only way we can be justified before God (Romans 3:24)?
10. What promise of God concerning Christ is quoted in Acts 2:27 and 31? What promise did Jesus make to the penitent thief (Luke 23:43)?