

“The Last Supper”

Saint Matthew’s Passion, Pt. 1

We’re starting a new series because it’s traditional for the last 2,000 years for Christians to consider and to think about and to reflect on the meaning of Christ’s death in these weeks leading up to Good Friday and Easter. And what we’re going to be doing for the next five weeks is we’re going to take a look at Saint Matthew’s gospel, at what he says about that last week of Jesus’ life, those last couple of days, in Matthew chapters 26, 27, and 28, which is traditionally called Saint Matthew’s Passion.

Now, you may have noticed we are using a lot of classical music during this series. Specifically a cantata of the same name by Johann Sebastian Bach. You see, some time in the Middle Ages, Christian churches began marking Holy Week by retelling the story of Christ’s crucifixion in musical form. They began simply - Bible verses set to simple chant melodies - but eventually they would culminate in the 1720’s in one of the most ambitious musical compositions of all time, Bach’s *Saint Matthew Passion*. It’s glorious art with a deeply theological and worshipful purpose.

A lot of early art was created with that purpose and so each week we will also be featuring a famous painting that coincides with the text we will be studying. Today we start off with an Italian – because of course you start

with an Italian! – Leonardo da Vinci’s, *The Last Supper*. Painted on the chapel wall of the Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan in 1495, the painting took four years to finish and it’s been in danger of fading away ever since. As early as the 18th century, it had become the most imitated, copied, reproduced work of art in human history.

Andy Warhol famously produced cheap copies of the masterpiece in hundreds of paintings and drawings. The reality is, in churches all around the planet the activity depicted in the Last Supper is being constantly reproduced in a wide variety of styles – some public and picturesque, others private and simple. And I think it’s fitting, because Jesus himself, by instituting the meal was copying and adapting an older, more complex original meal. We’ll discover more about that as we walk through our text this morning.

We’re going to start with the account in **Matthew 26:19**, “*So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.*” We’re going to be looking here at the words at the initial institution of the Lord’s Supper – Jesus last meal before his death. When you take a look at the deaths of the founders of the all the other major religions, you see they all are fairly similar. Just going by the texts of the religions themselves, for example, Moses dies at 120 years old, full of years, as strong as ever, an undisputed leader, who has brought his people to the verge of the Promised Land.

Buddha dies at the age of 80. He's surrounded by a host of his devotees. He dies in peaceful serenity, a complete success by that time. Confucius had originally been forced to leave his hometown of Qufu, but by the end, he comes back and is received there with honor, dying at the age of 72, surrounded by those who will continue his work. Muhammad dies in his 60s after having been the first political ruler of the united Arabia. He dies in the arms of his wife.

Now, let's contrast that for a minute. When you come to Christianity, you have a man who dies at perhaps age 33 who has a ministry at the very, very most of three years, and when he dies, he's alienated from his own people. He's killed by the colonial power of Rome. He's abandoned by most of his friends, and if you believe the text, he's even abandoned by God.

His death is premature. It's tragic. It's a disgrace. It's shameful because it's a crucifixion, and crucifixion was the *most* shameful, the *most* degraded of all forms of execution, only for the very worst criminals and slaves, because you were stripped naked and you died slowly with everybody just looking at you, watching you die an excruciating death.

Now here's the question. It makes perfect sense, in some ways, why the other religions did well. In other words, when you see a founder who teaches some

great truth about faith or some truth about spirituality or about how to live and you see the *peace* and the *blessing* in his life. You see the peace of his followers, and you see all of that, of course, people say, "That works! I'm going to give it a shot. I'm going to study it."

And they do, and then they adopt it. But here's what I want to know, one of the great questions of history. Why would *anyone* have looked at Jesus Christ, looked at the way his life ended... Why would anyone have looked at his life, seeing him die that way, seeing him die penniless, seeing him die naked... Why would anybody have looked at the way *his* life ended and say, "That's the message for me! That's what I want"? Why in the world...?

And the only possible answer is nobody would look at the cross and say, "A badge of honor. A way of peace. A way to blessing." *Nobody* would look at that, and yet we know, in spite of the fact it created *huge* problems for people, the early Christians adopted the cross as their emblem. I'll talk more about this next week. But Cicero said the word *crux*, which is the Latin word for cross, was a swear word. Now, I know we don't normally do this in church, but I want you to think of a four-letter word. I'll give you a minute. This should have been the mixer question! Ok, got one in mind? Now imagine yourself starting a church, name it the blankety-blank church of Austin, and see who comes.

Why was the cross a swear word? Because it represented *everything* wrong. It represented shame. It represented hostility. It represented weakness. It represented defeat. It represented absolute, utter humiliation. It represented all those things. Why, then, did the followers of Jesus Christ say, “This is what I want in my life, the cross. This is how I want to live. This is the message for me”? Who would have ever thought...?

The only answer to that historical question, “What would have ever possessed them to pick that up and say, ‘This is the life I want’?” is the fact of the crucifixion would only make people shudder and withdraw, but it was Jesus’ explanation of the crucifixion, Jesus’ *own* explanation of what it meant, that afterward - especially after his resurrection - his followers went back and *now* they saw it.

John Stott, in his book *The Cross of Christ* puts it this way, “The fact that a cross became the Christian symbol, and that Christians stubbornly refused, in spite of the ridicule, to discard it in favor of something less offensive, can have only one explanation. It means that the centrality of the cross originated in the mind of Jesus himself. It was out of loyalty to him that his followers clung so doggedly to this sign.”

In other words, it would never have occurred to anyone - no normal, rational person - to say, “That’s the life for me!” Jesus Christ explained, though, how the cross was a *transforming* reality, *the* central reality. And he does that in his passion and perhaps nowhere more powerfully than he does in the words he uses during his Last Supper.

Of course, it may have been *his* last supper, but in many ways it’s the *first* supper, the first of millions and millions and millions of these suppers. But in the Last Supper, which we read was a Passover meal, Jesus Christ in the clearest possible way explains the meaning of his death. And every week of this series, we’re going to ask, “What does his death mean?” We’re going to see different aspects, different perspectives.

But what we learn here in the Last Supper is Jesus gives us some of the *clearest* teaching on what the cross means, what his death means. And by using the Passover meal, he shows us three things: the **centrality** of his death - the importance of it - the **purpose** of his death - why he did it - and the **appropriation** of his death - how we apply it and make it our own. The centrality, the purpose, and how we connect, how we appropriate it ourselves. Let’s look.

First one, a brief point but important, **the centrality of his death** Now after verse 19 which we read, the story jumps into Judas and his betrayal – but we’re going to skip that and hold off on talking about Judas for a couple of weeks. What I want to focus on from this passage is the association of the Last Supper with a Jewish Passover meal. What was the Passover?

Well, central to the Jewish story is that Israel had been for many years in cruel bondage in the land of Egypt – they were slaves - and God had arranged for their deliverance under the great leader, Moses. They were about to escape – the Exodus - and on the night before the great deliverance, they ate a special meal.

Then God comes to them and says in **Exodus 12:14**, *“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.”* God says, “I want you to eat this meal over and over and over again, as a perpetual memorial, never stop commemorating this night.” And as a result, of course, Jewish descendants commemorate that great night of deliverance from Egypt with the Passover meal each year – the longest continually celebrated festival in human history.

And so Jesus is doing that with his disciples, they’re having a Passover meal. And in **v. 26** it says, *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying...”* What this means is Jesus is the presider. At a Passover meal you had to have a presider. The father, if it’s a family, or if it’s a group of people, somebody with authority would be named the presider. And it’s not surprising then that Jesus would get up here and begin to speak. Why? Because you’re not just supposed to *eat* the Passover meal. You’re supposed to *explain* it. And the presider’s job was to get up and explain what it meant.

And there is a set, traditional speech, some of you may have heard these words yourself at a Passover. Ordinarily, the presider would get up and say, “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness. They suffered that we would be delivered.” But *instead* of that, Jesus mixes it up. Look at the rest of **v.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.**”* He gets up and said, “This is the bread of *my* affliction. This is the bread through which *I’m* going to bring you out of a greater bondage.”

What Jesus is doing at this point, and this is remarkable, is he says, “What I’m about to suffer is this: Years ago we ate this supper on the night before God redeemed us and brought us out from under Pharaoh’s bondage, but tonight I’m going to pull off the greater redemption. We are eating it tonight on the eve before God again redeems His people, but this time not just from Pharaoh, not just from political slavery, but from sin and death itself.”

And when Jesus gets up and says, “...*this is my body*,” he is *replacing* the ordinary statements at the Passover, “This is the bread of *my* affliction.” And when he gets up and says it, this is what he is saying. He is saying in the most amazing terms - there’s no better way to say it - “My death is the central and climactic moment in the history of the world.”

All the history of the people of God has been moving toward this moment. *Every* return from exile. *Every* deliverance from any tyrant. *Every* substitutionary sacrifice of an animal. Everything! Everything that has ever happened in the whole history of redemption, in the whole history of God’s work with His people, everything is moving toward this. This is the climactic moment in the history of redemption...in the history of the world.

He couldn’t say it in a more amazing way. And that’s the first thing we see here. By taking the Passover meal – Jesus knew what he was doing - he could have done it some other way, but by doing the Passover meal he’s saying, “Everything has been pointing to me. This is the climactic moment. This is the deliverance above all deliverances. This is the exodus to end all exoduses.”

And interestingly, this is the only thing he ever tells people to do over and over. Even though Matthew does not record his words, we have them in Mark, in Luke, and in 1 Corinthians, where Paul gives us his words - they come four times in the Bible. Like in **Luke 22:19**, “*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; **do this in remembrance of me.**”*”

He makes *us* bound to perpetually remember through this meal the way God originally had said the same thing about the Passover. Notice there’s only one thing Jesus Christ tells you that you must do over and over and over again. This is not a dramatization of his birth. This is not a dramatization of his miracles. This is not a dramatization of his life or of his teaching, not even of his resurrection.

Over and over and over he wants you to dramatize his *death*, which means, “This is the main reason I came. This is the central thing. I have nothing to give you unless you believe and understand my death. Nothing! Nothing for you unless you grab this.” So the first thing we see in an amazing way here in the Last Supper is Jesus saying, “My death is central.” We’ll see how central next, so let’s take a look at the second point.

The **second** thing we learn here is by taking the Passover meal, Jesus is also explaining **the purpose of his death**. The real question is, *Why* did he die? What was Jesus’ purpose? What was he trying to achieve? And here we see, not the first saying, which was, “Take and eat; this is my body,” but the second statement.

It says, **v.27-28**, “*Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my **blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* That is so loaded. Listen, first of all, one of the problems in translating from Greek into English is the little word “for”. See it says, “...*poured out **for** many...*”.

The English word “for” is very, very general. It can mean so many things. To say, “I’m doing something *for* you,” could mean I’m doing something *because* of you. It could mean I’m doing something *in response* to you. But the particular preposition used here - and in all of the other places where Jesus’ words are given in the Last Supper - what he’s really saying is, “My blood is poured out *on behalf of* you, *instead* of you, *in-the-stead* of you.”

This is a language of sacrificial self-substitution, and, boy, there is no better way for him to explain it. “What’s that - sacrificial self-substitution?” Well, let’s go again to what the Passover meal is. There were three basic elements in the Passover meal. One was unleavened bread. Why? It represented the haste, the urgency of those times. They had to eat unleavened bread because they didn’t have time to wait for it to rise. Got to go!

Secondly, they drank wine. There were four cups of wine that were passed around, because they represented the four great promises in Exodus 6, which were read as they were drinking the wine. So they had unleavened bread, and they had a cup of wine. But what was the main course? Obviously, wine and bread are not enough for a meal. What was the main course?

A lamb. And the lamb was the point of the Passover. God had said to Pharaoh, “Let my people go. Let my people go. Let my people go.” And Pharaoh continually said, “No. No. No.” Finally, God comes to Moses and says, “I’m going to make him an offer he can’t refuse. I’m going to send the angel of judgment - the angel of death - and he’s going to move through the land and judge the wickedness of everyone in the land. And the way he’s going to do that is he’s going to strike dead the firstborn son in every family.”

“*Then*” God says to Moses, “Finally, Pharaoh will let you go. This stroke will *redeem* you. This stroke is the one that will get you out.” But God gives some very detailed instructions for the Hebrews to follow. These instructions for Passover and God says, “Let me tell you what you need to do on that night, you need to eat a Passover supper.” Why is it called Passover?

Well, he says, “The main course is the lamb. You slay the lamb, of course, and then you eat the lamb, but you take the blood of that lamb and you *smear* it on the doorposts over your front door, so that when the angel of judgment comes by, the death angel will *pass over* you.” Do you know one of the things most amazing about this? This is the most non-discriminatory thing I’ve ever seen.

God does not say, “When judgment comes, of course, it will only hit the bad people, not you good people. It will only hit the Egyptians, not you Jewish people. It will only hit those people who have the wrong religion, not the people who have the right religion.” No! What is God saying? He is saying, “When my judgment comes down, every single household will be subject to it.”

He says, “Don’t you understand? There’s a deeper problem than what Pharaoh is doing to you. See politically, they’re the oppressors and you are the victims, but spiritually, you’re *all* alienated from me. Spiritually, you all want to be your own gods, you want to be your own lords, and your selfishness is reeking havoc on my creation.” In other words, “You’re all sinners.” And what God is saying is, “You will not be saved tonight unless you put the blood of the lamb over your doorpost and take shelter under it.”

What did that mean that night? Here’s what it would have meant. First of all, the family would have had to admit, “We’re not going to be able to pass muster on our own if the angel of judgment comes by – we don’t qualify - and the only way to do it is if a lamb is slain.” In every home in that whole country, there was either a dead lamb or a dead son. It was one or the other. In other words, every firstborn son who survived that night looked down at the lamb and said, “This lamb died for me.”

Now, notice something interesting about the text. Jesus picks up the *bread* and says, “This is the bread of my affliction.” Jesus picks up the *cup*, “This is the blood of the covenant”. But wait a minute. Where is the main course? What kind of meal is this? Have you ever noticed that? We do this every so often. It’s not very filling, is it? Anybody ever skip lunch after we partake in the Lord’s Supper? You say, “A cracker and a shot glass of grape juice. Where’s the main course?”

There is no main course. In the text, Jesus never refers to the lamb. Jesus never points to the lamb. We don’t even know if there *was* a lamb there...but there was. Jesus was the Lamb. In other words, Jesus Christ is saying to them, “Do you really believe, friends, that our ancient ancestors were saved because of some little woolly furballs? Our firstborn sons were saved because God was going to offer up His firstborn Son, and tonight He does.”

Jesus Christ, therefore, is saying, “I am the substitute. I take the judgment. I am slain so you’re not.” There’s a reason that all four gospel accounts lead up to a main emphasis on the passion narrative. That’s what Jesus’ very life was all about. We’ll see in future weeks that everything he was doing was leading to his death. It’s the culmination of his ministry. His life as a substitute for ours.

What does this mean? Again, we’ll be able to look at this over the weeks, but here’s what it means. It means at least two things. The first thing it means is if Jesus’ death is substitutionary, then Christianity is an all or nothing thing. Around 230 AD before Christianity was recognized as a legitimate religion in the Roman Empire, the emperor Alexander Severus took notice of these new Christians and was kind of impressed. Which was a big deal considering many of the emperors on either side of him persecuted the Christians.

But Alexander viewed them favorably. So much so that he added a statue of Christ to his pantheon alongside the statues of the other gods that he worshipped. And he bowed down and prayed to Jesus – you know, might as well be safe, cover all the bases. But the thing that really bugged everybody, though, was the Christians wouldn’t return the favor – they wouldn’t worship him. I mean, here was the emperor willing to bow down to Christ. Why wouldn’t the Christians bow down to the emperor?

And see the Christians said, “We can’t worship Christ at all unless we worship Christ alone.” Why? It’s for this reason. Why did Jesus die? You’ve heard many people say, “To show his love.” Have you heard that? Now imagine a boy and a girl taking a stroll along the banks of a river, and he says, “I don’t think you realize how much I love you, let me show you.” And he throws himself into the river and drowns.

And does the girl say, “Oh, my word! He really, really did love me”? No. What she says is, “What an idiot! He’s mental!” That doesn’t show any love at all. If you’re going to die for no reason, that’s irrational. It’s mad. It’s wicked. It’s wrong.

If you’re going to die for somebody, you can only die for somebody if it’s the *only* way. See suicide is a bad thing. Suicide does not show anybody you love them. Now if the girl was *in* the water and the boy jumped in and risked his life and died *saving* her, *then* she would say, “Oh, how he loved me.” Now here’s the point. If Jesus Christ died - and nobody doubts that - unless he died substitutionarily, unless he died in our place, unless he died to take our sins, unless he died, in other words, in order to really save us because we can’t save ourselves, that means his death is ridiculous. It’s stupid. It’s awful.

Now what does that mean to people who say, “Well, look. There are many ways to God. I believe all good people can reach God. Christians can reach God if they’re good people. Everybody who is a good person can get to God.” But wait a minute! There is *nothing* good about Christianity unless it’s the *only* way in. Jesus’ death on the cross, unless it’s the *only* way, unless there was *no other possible way* for us to get to God, his death is terrible. It’s wrong. It’s wicked. It’s stupid. It’s irrational.

And therefore, if Christianity is based on, as we see here, the centrality of the cross...it’s either based on something stupid and wicked and irrational, and therefore, it’s *not* one more way to get to God...or else it’s *the* way to get to God. See, what Jesus is claiming here is a way of saying, “You can’t put me in a pantheon. It’s all or nothing.”

There’s one other thing the substitutionary death means. Every other religion says, “The covenant is based on your commitment to me.” In other words, in every other religion the god says, as it were, “Your commitment to me, if you really work hard, if you so the right things, then we’ll have covenant if you’re really committed.” Jesus Christ is the one who says, “Oh, no. Your salvation is based on God’s commitment to you. This is the blood of the covenant.”

What he’s saying is, “Here’s how you see how much I’m committed to you.” The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ makes Christianity unique. It’s either *the* inferior religion or the *superior* religion. It’s the claim of what he did on the cross. We can’t help that. As Christians, we really don’t have control over this. It’s just what he claimed.

The average, modern American hates this “all or nothing.” They definitely want to move Christianity into the pantheon. It’s important because they see so much good in it, but don’t be so exclusive. Jesus Christ says, “No! This blood was poured out for you. I have died for you, and my death is meaningless and wicked unless it’s the only way you can be rescued.”

Lastly. We’ve said about Jesus using the Passover for his Last Supper is, number one it tells you the *centrality* of his death and number two it tells you the *purpose* of his death – substitutionary. But **number three**, it tells us that you have to make it yours – it tells us **how you appropriate his death for yourself**. This is one of the most interesting things about Jesus’ use of the Last Supper, the Passover, is it tells us we each have to make it our own. The death of Jesus Christ does not necessarily or automatically do anything for you, just like you could starve to death in the presence of a meal. You have to *eat* it! Notice, Jesus Christ does not just say, “This is my body.” He says, “eat it” He doesn’t just say, “This is my blood.” He says, “drink it”.

And so what he’s saying is, “You must learn how to make the benefits of the cross yours. You must pick it up. You must take it.” Now we have to honestly admit that these words have been *tremendously* debated over the centuries. I think it’s only fair for me to tell you, the basics of the debate.

On the one hand, you have the very high view of the Lord’s Supper. The Catholic Church, but also Martin Luther - I know a lot of you think of Luther as the enemy of the Catholic Church, but not in this area - because the Catholic Church *and* Martin Luther believed when Jesus says, “This is my body,” he meant the actual physical food was his body. Martin Luther used to bang the table, “*Hoc est enim corpus meum*. This *is* my body.” It doesn’t say, “This *represents* my body.” He said, “This *is* my body.”

And the high view says, “If you want to appropriate it, you just get the bread and the wine and you eat it. If you have the bread and the wine, if you have the physical elements, you have Jesus.” Now on the other end of the spectrum, you have the typical evangelical Protestant who says, “No. This just *represents* his body. This is nothing but symbol. It’s just a memorial service. It doesn’t really *do* anything special to you.”

Now without going into all the deep weeds, I want you to know I believe – and maybe I’m wishy-washy - in an *absolute compromise*. On the one hand, when Jesus Christ said, “This is my body and this is my blood,” it *had* to be representational. I’m sorry. Because Jesus Christ’s *actual* body was holding the bread. Right? So how could that be? And, because Jesus’ blood, when he said, “This is my blood,” his blood hadn’t been spilled yet. That night, *at least*, it had to be representational. So being able to say, “This is my body and this is my blood,” does not necessarily mean it literally is.

On the other hand, there's another place where Jesus speaks about this that, I think, goes beyond what the Protestants very often claim for the Lord's Supper. It's in **John 6:53-55**, "*Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink."*

And as you might imagine, people found that unsettling! So dropping down it says, **John 6:61,63, 65**, "*Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?...The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. **The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life**...He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."*

See, that seems to go beyond what the Protestants are willing to grant, and here's what I would give you really briefly. I'll show you how it works for the last couple of minutes. Do you see where Jesus says there "*My **words are Spirit and life***"? That's a weird way to put it. Here's what I think it means. When you take the Lord's Supper - which we are about to do - I believe that when I understand the words of Christ about his death, when I eat and drink the bread and the cup, remembering and *thinking* about what his death means, the Spirit of God in a more profound way than any other place - more profound than your quiet time, more profound than a

worship night, more profound than a Connect Group meeting, and those are all pretty important – but in a more profound way than anything else, Jesus and the Holy Spirit take the cross and really shape your heart with it, really bring the cross into your experience.

It makes it a controlling consciousness. You say, "Why? What's the big deal?" Think about this. For example, the cross is an emblem of shame for Jesus, but for us, Paul says, "We should *glory* in the cross." Why? Why would we glory in the cross? Well, Paul says the cross is a source of glory, of significance, of worth, because when you see the Lord of the universe was willing to take the shame of the cross because he valued us that much, think of how much he loves us. Think of how much worth we have. Think of how much he values us. The cross means we are of *infinite* value.

Now, do you *feel* that way? Do you walk around at work or at school with that kind of confidence and joy? Do you not care what people think about you because you know what Jesus thinks about you? Do you have that kind of incredible self-image? No. And how are you going to get that? "I'm just going to say, 'I know God loves me.'" No, no, no. Come to the Lord's Supper and take his words that are Spirit and life and take the elements and, by faith, tell yourself what the cross means. And as you partake, the Holy Spirit does a deep work, and it brings that glory into your life.

Let me give you another one. The cross is a symbol, not only of shame, but it's also a symbol of hostility. The cross is a symbol of the fact Jesus Christ went up against the Romans, went up against the authorities, and lost. But Paul says the cross is our peace. Before the world was marked by hostility between the people of God and the people of the world, but that God sent Jesus, **Ephesians 2:16**, "*in one body to **reconcile** both of them to God **through the cross**, by which he put to death their hostility.*" He has brought down the dividing wall between all kinds of groups who had been at odds. The *cross* has brought down the dividing wall between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, and between male and female."

Why would that be? Here's what Paul is saying. He says, "If the cross is a living reality in your life, that means you know it's a humbling thing. You know you are so lost there was nothing less than this that could save you, and that humbles you." So groups of people you always felt superior to, you no longer feel superior to.

And the cross also represents Jesus Christ dying for us while we were his enemies. It's the ultimate pattern of someone doing self-donation to the *other* - to the other race, to the other gender, to the other class. Jesus Christ's cross humbles us and gives us a pattern, so that if it becomes a living reality in your life, you will be able to have relationships with people who otherwise you never could; people you couldn't bring yourself to embrace.

Let me keep going. Are you suffering? The cross completely transforms your suffering if it's taken into the center of your life. Why? Because of *all* the gods, of *all* the religions this is the only God with *scars*. Jesus still bears the marks of the cross. And the cross means, even though suffering remains a mystery, God stands with you in suffering, and He works His will in suffering redemptively.

I'll even press you a little further. If the cross is something really, really central to your consciousness, you will not judge a book by its cover. In other words, it's very typical that we look at how other people are dressed, or what they drive, or where they go to school and we determine their worth. But if you understand the Lord's Supper you won't do that, because the cross was an *apparent* defeat, it was an *apparent* weakness, but it was *really* strength and power.

And if the cross is central in your mind, you're not going to write people off. You're not going to look at a situation and say, "It's lost." You're going to be very, very discerning. You're going to look beneath the surface. You're not going to judge a book by its cover. Over and over again. The cross gets rid of your guilt. The cross leads you to say, "If he died for me, then I'm going to be risky, and I'm going to be adventurous for him."

If the cross is put into the center of your being through the Lord's Supper and the particular way that Jesus Christ says, "I'll meet you at the table," more and more and more you will become a *person* of the cross. You'll be filled with confidence, and you'll be filled with humility, and you'll be able to handle suffering, and you'll live a guilt-free life – so many things are contained in this little cracker and tiny cup!

What is the Lord's Supper? Interesting. The last thing he says is, **v.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.*" You see, even for Jesus, it's only the *last* supper...for now! What's this pointing too?

I think I've told you that I've been reading *The Lord of the Rings* again. It's my favorite novel, I've read it every decade of my life since my teens and I realized I need to get after it while I still have my 40's! But one of my favorite characters is a Hobbit named Pippin. And he gets caught up in the adventure and at the end winds up in the main battle at the city gates of Minas Tirith and all looks lost. They put up a brave fight but they are outnumbered and overwhelmed and the Lord of the Nazgûl – this dark demon king – is about to pass through the gates and conquer the great city. All is lost!

But just when it looks like it's all over for the good guys, horns begin to blow in the distance. The cavalry has arrived! The King of Rohan rides a great horse at the head of his army and joins the battle. The king dies in the fight, but in the process he saves the city – and with it Pippin. And here is the passage when the hobbit hears the horns blow, "But Pippin rose to his feet, as if a great weight had been lifted from him; and he stood listening to the horns, and it seemed to him that they would break his heart with joy. And never in after years could he hear a horn blown in the distance without tears starting in his eyes." (*The Return of the King*, Bk 5, Ch6)

From then on, when he'd hear a horn he'd begin to cry. Why? Because whenever he heard a horn blowing in the distance he received a *living memory* of his salvation. Of course, he spent all of his life recounting the story, "Oh I remember that day I was saved. I was as good as dead. If it wasn't for the king who rode to his death for my sake, I wouldn't be alive." He *knew* it, but whenever he heard the horn he knew it in a *deeper* way. He got a *living memory*. He burst into tears – it went from his head to his heart.

Now the fact of the matter is when you look at the elements of the bread and the cup, what is that? That's a horn blowing in a distance. It's reminding you, not only of the day in which the great King rode to his death in weakness on a little donkey. But it's also reminding you of the day to come in which the King of Kings and Lord of Lords comes back again, not come riding on a donkey, but riding on a great white horse in absolute triumph to put everything right.

And that's what Jesus is saying. "When you eat this thing, you're not only remembering that *past* day, that *sad* day, but you're remembering that *incredible* day that's coming. You're *between* these two days, and I tell you I will give you a living memory of the reality of your salvation whenever you eat and drink in faith."

There are a lot of great things that you can do as a Christian to strengthen your faith. But I don't think – because of what Jesus said in this text - that there's *anything* as important than what we're about to do this morning.

Let's pray...