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The Shoulder - Lord's Supper - The Bread

Introduction

It was on Sunday, April 5th 1959 when I, for the first time, sat with a number of saints to remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread and drinking the cup. That means in round figures I have been at that spread table approximately 3,500 times. I say that because it never ceases to amaze me the solemnity of the responsibility of being a guest at that table and the honoured privilege of being fitted by God's grace to partake of those emblems.

Recently the Lord brought before me in a fresh way the significance of the holding in my hands the bread and then partaking of it. It was not in my reading of the institution or Paul's teaching, but from 1 Samuel 9:23-24, where it is recorded, "And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, 'Behold that which is left! Set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people'. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day." That which I was impressed by was Saul was in an honoured place and set before him was the shoulder, and he was commanded to eat. As I pondered on why note was taken of the shoulder and it being set before Saul, it was evidently a mark of honour but was there more to it? A little research showed that in the law of the peace offering it is recorded, "The right shoulder shall ye give unto the priest . . . and . . . shall have the right shoulder" (Lev. 7:32, 33). That which Saul was given was not his naturally, it was the priest's portion.

This raised a very major truth which Saul ought to have understood the significance of. He should have realized that since this was the priests portion, he was being doubly honoured. He was being honoured by those gathered, but more importantly, it was to be a practical object lesson. By partaking he was to live a priest like life. Sadly, Saul was very far from being priestly in life. He was a coward when it came to Goliath, he had fits of temper in which he sought to kill David, and he would use conciliatory language when caught. Saul failed to live up to that which he partook of and ate.

Application To Us

Across the world on Sunday mornings there are thousands of gatherings who meet for the greater glory of God. On a table there is bread (1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23, 26-28) and in the language of 1 Samuel 9:24, it is "set before" those gathered. As in the case with Saul, it is both a solemn but joyful occasion. The Lord said, "This do in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19), and Paul by inspiration wrote, "Ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). On an occasion after the children of Israel were released out of Egypt, the elders went up to the top of the mount and there sat and ate and drank with God (Ex. 24:11). That was a very sacred moment, sitting with the God of Glory eating and drinking. I am sure there would have been no allowance for any intrusion of earthly responsibilities there, no idle gossip, and a great deal not only of reverence, but previous self cleansing.

When that table of the Lord is set before us and we see on it priestly food, the bread symbolizing the body of the Lord and the cup symbolizing the covenant ratified by His blood, we can thank God for the fulness of the salvation provided, however, the purpose is not for us to think of our blessing, but to exalt and extol His wonderful person and work.

Then there comes a point of time when each individual takes the bread in their hands. They hold that which is an emblem of the body of the Lord. How dare anyone treat this holy emblem as just a piece of bread. Some years ago a so called Christian editor wrote concerning the Lord's supper that it was little more than a religious frat get together. That is utter blasphemy. If the symbolic feasts of ancient Israel were called "holy convocations" (Lev. 23:2, 4, 37), how much more holy is this feast, and how solemn to take into ones hands and hold the holy emblems. Isaiah wrote words which shadowed the words of Paul when he wrote, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11) and "let a man examine himself" (1 Cor. 11:28).

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When The Remembrance Supper Was Instituted

Paul is very careful to make note that it was on the same night when the Lord was betrayed He took bread (1 Cor. 11:23). Why such importance? Why was it not instituted on the Holy Mountain at transfiguration; or when the crowds wanted to make him king; or when He was with loud acclamations that He was the son of David; or when He was baptized; but on the night he was betrayed? It was on that night and the next morning the full blast of satanic spite and hatred was vented upon Him by sinful men. The coming of the chief priests etc. to take Him for the six false trials were only hours away, the nailing to the cross was perhaps only 12 hours away, and the suffering for sin perhaps 15 hours. The next hours were to be hours of painful flogging, verbal despising, vocal hatred and eventually nailed to a Roman stake. The message was clear, to eat that bread that is set before us is to live life before God for His pleasure and consequently to know the rejection of the world. It means to be willing to give our bodies, even to suffering and death, for the greater glory of God.

What Partaking Of The Bread Means

When I take and eat that bread, which I repeat is the priestly portion and which symbolizes the Lord's body, it indicates that my body is to reflect the beauty and character of Christ. In what ways was the Lord beautiful? He never went anywhere He would not have been in full fellowship with His Father, He never said anything that He had not heard from His Father, He never did anything contrary to God His Father. His beauty was seen in at least thirty-two ways, such as: the beauty of His compassion, composure, fidelity, godly fear, gracious speech, thoughtfulness, censuring, unbiasedness, reputation, zeal, and accuracy of teaching.

In the context of His body, one considers the beauty of His disfigurements (Isa. 52:14). It is an aspect of the Lord which had never been brought to my attention until some forty-four years ago. My Dad had come to visit us and kindly papered the hallway. However, at one point the paper tore, and since there was no more, he fixed it as best he could. That torn piece meant more to me than all the rest for it told me of his sorrow in what had happened and of his loving kindness to do that which I could not do. As I look on the bread and break it, deliberately I break it, then I think of His sorrows in Gethsemane and the fulness His love for me. Suddenly His nail scarred hands and feet, the bruised body, the buffeted face are so beautiful to me and I just want to reverently bow at His feet in spiritually broken emotion and worship. I take that bread and muse on the words, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14) and I can do nought else but say the words of Frances Ridley Havergal:

Take my hands, and let them move, at the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be, swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing, always, only, for my King;
Take my lips and let them be, filled with messages from Thee.

Take my will, and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord I pour, at Thy feet its treasure-store,
Take myself and I will be, ever, only, all for Thee.

. . . . Rowan Jennings