

Happy Mother's Day moms. How often our children been served by your sacrifices, the vast majority of those—no doubt—going completely unnoticed. Thank you for loving us, not because of us, but more often than not, in spite of us. For all the times you've asked but we've neglected to pick up our laundry, scrape our plates in the trash, brush our teeth, make our beds, etc., etc., etc, and yet you have continued to wash our clothes, make us dinner, pick up after us, etc., etc., etc., you have shown us what grace means, what it is to be favored despite our deserving it. And in that way, you prepare us to see & receive God's grace, God's unmerited favor given to us through His Son Jesus Christ. And for that we thank you, and we thank Him.

Kids, I hope you have some sort of special way of letting your mom know how much she means to you today, some special coloring you've done, or song you could sing, or gift you could give her. Gift giving is one of the best ways we can express our love. With that, I wonder what other holiday we might think of when we think of gifts? Little ones, I wonder what your favorite holiday is? I think it only natural to grow up loving Christmas most of all, especially with all the surprise & joy of receiving gifts on that special morning. Even for adults—even mature adults—Christmas is still pretty special, isn't it? Not only is there the unwrapping of unexpected or patiently-waited-for gifts, but there is also the (perhaps) surpassing-joy of gift *giving*, of watching someone unwrap something that thrills them, something you spent time making, or searching or saving for, something that attests to your love for them, of their value to you. Along with Mother's Day, Christmas rocks, doesn't it? Praise the Lord for annual events on the calendar when we get to practice the joy of gift-giving, the joy of bringing others *joy*. Gift giving has a way of pointing us to the greatest gift ever given on Christmas morning: Jesus!

I couldn't help thinking about Christmas as I was preparing for this sermon. I was struck by the fact that, as far as I can recall, not once did Jesus ever tell us to commemorate His *birth*. We do, of course, and I don't think there is anything wrong with that at all. In fact I think it's absolutely right that we celebrate the birth of our Savior. But it's interesting that not once in Scripture do we find a command to do so, not once are we instructed to "remember His birth", to set aside time on our calendars or in our schedules to commemorate our Lord's *birth*. Throughout the pages of Holy Scripture, nowhere does our Lord ever say, "Remember My birth". But neither does He say anywhere, "Remember My *teachings*", or "Remember My *miracles*," or even "Remember My *life*." But, what is undeniable—so much so that it's noted in all four Gospels—is that our Lord tells us very plainly to "Remember [His] *death*." What an odd & wonderful phenomenon.

26 Ever wonder what the blessing was that Jesus said here? According to tradition, that prayer would have most likely sounded something like this: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, *who brings forth bread from the earth.*” Then He took that piece of bread that He had lifted up and given thanks for and gave a simple explanation as to its meaning: “This bread,” He said, “the broken bread of The Passover, that you, that we, that our families have been eating for generations, year after year since that night in Egypt, this bread that My Father has brought forth from the earth, eat it, for it is My Body, broken for you.” [pause] And with that, He must have *stunned* them all... if not that night, Lord knows more & more so as the next few days, as the next weeks, years and millenniums would pass, as believers down through the generations would look back on those recorded words, and realize with increasing clarity & power what He meant. The way God carved for us—for sinners—to be associated, to be restored, re-related to Him would be through the death of His Son, the Bread of Life, and our eating of the bread of His Body at His own command to do so.

27 This was most likely the third cup of wine that was shared during The Passover meal, the “cup of blessing” as it was called. Again, Jesus took it, and most likely prayed the same traditional prayer they had all heard many times over, growing up and sharing this supper together: “*Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.*” Then He turned to each of them and commanded them all “Drink from it, all of you.”

28 Notice He didn’t say, “If you want some, have a sip.” No. He commanded “Drink of it, all of you.” In v27 He commanded them *all* to drink, and now in v28 we see why: it was His blood which would purchase for them the promised New Covenant, the means of forgiveness for their sins. No doubt these young men had grown up listening with great hope to Rabbi’s recite the prophecies of the New Covenant, words like those of Jeremiah & Ezekiel, promises of forgiveness, of a new heart, of God’s very own Spirit. Listen to the words of Jeremiah 31:

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me,*

*from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” -vv31-34*

Such wonderful hope the prophet proclaimed. But how could that be? Wonder of wonders, how would God bring it to pass? They spent hundreds of years thereafter inquiring of the Lord in His Word. But then stood Jesus, the Lamb of God, before His disciples that Thursday night. With His simple words He lifted the veil, He removed the shroud covering the Old Testament prophecy and proclaimed the means by which these awesome ancient promises would be fulfilled: the forgiveness of sins & the gift of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit would be purchased by the blood of God’s very own Son, by His death on the cross at Calvary.

29 Though He commanded His *disciples* to continue commemorating His death this way, that even still today, whenever *we* take of His bread & drink from His cup, all in God’s family are to *remember*, to recall Jesus’ death. And though He commanded *us* to continue sharing this meal together, He said that He would not share it with us again until the consummation of His Kingdom, until His second coming. As we have seen in the last couple of chapters, when He returns, that is when He will sit down at the Messianic banquet, with His faithful Bride, and enjoy the fruit of the vine once again.

So, I hope you see what Jesus is doing here, how He is tying up the Old & the New together. The Old finds its fulfillment in Him, just as the New finds its origins in Him. His body & blood are not only the means of fulfilling & providing for *past* promises, they are also the hope of our *future* joy, Savior-side at the banquet. The fourth cup of wine shared at supper represented God’s promise from Exodus 6.7. There God foretold that He would take His people as His own people, and He would be their God! So imagine that night, Jesus, standing before the fourth cup, God’s promise to take His people to Himself, to make them His own, to be their God. And then Jesus basically says, “How will that come about? Through my suffering the bitter cup of death, I vow to serve you the cup of blessing, which I will drink with you anew when I come again in my Father’s Kingdom.” Awesome! The symbolism at that supper was so thick!

30 Traditionally, this last hymn would be sung responsively. The head of the household or leader of the gathering—in this case, Jesus—would sing a few lines of the *Hallel*, parts of Psalms 114-118. Then the others would respond with “Hallelujah!” None of those men really understood what was going on at that moment, but can you imagine, after Jesus’ death & resurrection, as they would recall that supper together and the songs they sang thereafter, how the revelation of Jesus’ words would ring out anew in their hearts and minds? Words that Jesus

sung like those from Psalm 116.12-13: “*What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD*”? Or perhaps those from Psalm 118 that depicts the Lord’s ultimate triumph despite the rejection of those around Him? Or maybe the words of Psalm 117 which describe all nations singing & praising God for His covenant love & benefits: “*Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!*”

31 Matthew’s citation here is more personal than the other Gospel writers. It’s all the *personal pronouns* that give these words their weight: “YOU will fall away because of ME.” Not just “the sheep are about to be scattered because the Shepherd will be struck,” which is absolutely true, but Matthew records how clearly & pointedly Jesus explained the meaning of those words: YOU—my disciples... of all people... you, the ones who know me best, you who have been with me, seen my miracles, listened to my teaching, and, therefore, who know & confessed Me to be the Messiah... this very night, YOU—will all fall away because of Me.

The intimacy they’d just enjoyed at the Last Supper was so short-lived, wasn’t it? In just a few hours, all of the disciples would trade in their intimacy with Jesus for cowardice & betrayal. O how much they are just like us, aren’t they? One minute: “Praise the Lord! I will always be faithful to You, O God, my Rock & my Redeemer,” only the next to be flirting again with some false-promising sin. Though Jesus had repeatedly prophesied His impending death—the Shepherd would be struck—little had they any clue that in the next few hours, indeed, that’s exactly what would happen. Would their defection & betrayal come as a shock or surprise to Jesus? No, in fact, His words were meant to prepare *them* for it as well. He not only knew their denials were coming, He wanted to prepare them for it, to assure them *He knew*, that, in fact, “it [was] written” of long before. In other words, even their fear & flight from their Shepherd was within the sovereign plan of Almighty God.

32 Just think how His men would have felt had Jesus not spoken these few words. Without these few words of hope & promise, His men would have been left to wander, left thinking that their being scattered, that their running away from their Shepherd as He was struck... that such would be their permanent condition, tail-tucked between their legs, running for cover, back to their *old* homes, to their old jobs, to their old ways, the old life Jesus had called them from. But no, He wouldn’t leave them with those thoughts lingering long in their hearts & minds. The Shepherd instead proclaimed, “Listen boys, after I am raised, I will still lead you on, going before you into Galilee. *We will* meet again. I will see you there.”

33 O Peter. O *brother* Peter. Dear friend, mirror of many souls down through the years. Note his focus. Note what is occupying his thoughts? Never mind the suffering of the Servant of God. Never mind the striking the Shepherd was about to endure. Did He even notice what Jesus just said about His begin struck? Peter's too caught up with himself, with Jesus' audacious, outlandish notion that *he* could possibly be shaken off course, derailed from following so faithfully. "Not a chance, Jesus! Have You forgotten: I'm Peter the Rock!"

In Peter's estimation, for the Shepherd to be struck would mean defeat. That would mean that somehow the striker would have gotten past Peter: you know, Jesus' first line of defense. "Not on my watch, Jesus!" But what Peter simply cannot see is that the only way for such proud arrogance and self-assuredness to be defeated... was for the Lamb to be slain, for the Shepherd to be struck. Yes, sheep would be scattered. Yes, even the rock would fall away. But as tragic & irresponsible as that would be, still the Savior was at the helm, never out of control.

34 "Truly," Jesus says. And by now we know what that means, don't we? Jesus not only predicts Peter's betrayal, but He follows it up with emphasis, with "Truly": "I mean it, Peter. This is going to happen. In just the next few hours, you are going to fail. The confidence you have in yourself, the loyalty you are so proud of... is going to fail. You will deny Me, not once, not twice, but three times. But I want you to know that *I know*. I know it. I know this already, even now, before it happens. And yet I am not leaving or forsaking you. I am here, with you, preparing you, assuring you of your restoration, of your hope: Me! My faithfulness to My Father and to you.

35 Do you think Peter had any idea what was coming? Clearly his words attest to the fact that what he still had in mind was human heroism, not divine restoration. His thoughts & estimations were on his own power & ability, not on the power of sin that can only be severed by God: "Peter, don't you remember that with man *nothing* is possible; but only with God are *all things* are possible?" It's obvious that Peter is gritting his teeth here, flexing his pecs, getting ready for battle. But, truth be told, none of those self-confident disciples had any idea what was ahead, what *must* be accomplished, or how it would come about.

Jesus knew, yet He loved. He knew why He came. He came to die, yet never shrank in the face of such a threat everyday He walked the earth. He knew the disciples would deny Him, yet He never ceased to love, to care & to prepare for them.

With such a God, with such a Lover of our souls, such a Good Shepherd, what are we so afraid of? What holds us back from risking it all, from laying our lives down to love one another, from picking up the phone to make a call toward reconciliation, from confessing the shameful sin,

from being freed from its shackles & bondage? Why are we so afraid to trust & obey Him, to confess our weakness, our frailty, our failures, our smallness, our sin, our need for His help, for His provision, for His forgiveness, for His salvation. Because of our pride? O to hell with pride. That's where it's from & that is where it will return. Don't let it kill you for all eternity. Confess it. Hand it over to the One who was bled out at Calvary to put it all to death, once for all.

He *already* knows all your failures. He know your denials. He knows those of your present, past & future. And yet He still beckons you, "Come to Me! See my hands & my feet. Touch my side, Thomas. These wounds were for your freedom from sin, freedom from fear & insecurity, freedom from judgement, from the scrutiny of others, freedom from the abuse of others, freedom from your past hurts, freedom from the bondage of your own identity, freedom from the shackles you've put yourself in. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." He knows you, through & through, what you've done, what you're doing, what you will do, and He—better than anyone else—even knows & understands *why*. And still He calls, "Come to Me, all you who are heavy laden. Lay the burden at My feet. It is too heavy for you to carry. I permitted it only to bring you to this point of surrender, to give Me the reigns of Your life, to give Me control, to hand Me your future, your friends, your employment, your career, your family, your children, your parents, your sickness, your sorrow, your successes, your failures, your life, your love, your eternity. Take My yoke upon you, for My yoke is easy & My burden is light."

What did you carry in here with you this morning, friend? Don't you see that the gate is too narrow to continue any longer with it? Praise the Lord He would not permit you carry it into eternity, to carry it any further than the gate. Praise the Lord He insists we lay it down, to be transformed, to have all things made new, to entrust our burden to Him who knows our infirmities & weaknesses, all our doubts & denials, yet still says, "Come to Me." He is the only One who has truly said, "though all others fail you because of you, yet I will never fall away, I will never fail you. I will never leave you nor forsake you." O thirsty soul, run to such a fountain of love, hope, forgiveness, compassion & life. What keeps you from it? Shame? He has already suffered the shame. He shook it off that Sunday morning. There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Why? Because He has already been condemned for you. God poured on Him the judgement you deserved, found Him guilty of your sin, suffered Him all the punitive damages, He paid them in full. As testimony, as witness to the fact that your debt was satisfied by payment of His blood, He rose again from the grave, the check cleared. There is therefore now no reason not to come to the One who stands ready to receive you. Would you trust Him today? In as much as it is possible with you, would you entrust your heart,

your mind, your will to Him? Setting aside your own ambition, your own ideas & words, would you take up *the mantle of glory* in His Word, would you be suited with His Spirit of life, with His love & faithfulness toward His Father, toward your beloved brothers & sisters in His family? Would your life be made new, washed clean in the fountain of His blood? Would you surrender your life to Him? ¿How? How do you do that? Start right there, in prayer, asking Him *how*, asking Him to show you, “Lord, I don’t know what to do. I have all this baggage & sin that I want to lay down. I have all these habits & addictions, these fears & insecurities and I don’t know how to lay them down. But this morning I see Christ before me, whose blood was shed for my sins. And I want to lay them down, You have brought me to the place where I want to entrust them all to Him, to give Him my life. Would You take me & lead me, Father? Would You make me Your child? Would You show me the way everyday?” He will be faithful. He cannot be otherwise.

## **PRAYER**

**SONG:** *Come Thou Fount*

## **COMMUNION**

**SONG:** *Glorious Christ*

**BENEDICTION:** *Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. –1Th3.11-13*