

Luke 22:19 "What is Communion Supposed to Remember?"

Written by K B Napier
Saturday, 23 March 2013 09:38

(Updated 25th March 2013 to provide further clarification)

(Note: In this paper I will specifically and only deal with the actual meaning of the chosen text).

Now and then I send out a personal message to readers on our mailing list. That is, to those who elect to receive them, and not on the website itself, except on rare occasions. On Sunday 17th March, 2013 I sent out the following message. In this paper I will 'fill in the gaps' for those who might be confused.

"The Simplicity of Communion versus the Pomposity of Tradition

As usual, we had a great study time today (Luke 22). And what a difference between what the churches in the traditional 'system' teach and practice, and what Jesus Himself did at His 'last supper'! There is no comparison. How complex and slightly off-the-mark man has made this simple but profound time!

Jesus thanked the Father for the bread and wine. Nothing fancy – just a short word of thanks for the provision. Not thousands of words in the guise of prayer lasting maybe half an hour!

And what did Jesus tell us to remember? No, it was not His coming sacrifice. Yet, how many thousands of words are again uttered in those long-lasting communion 'services', all concentrating on the death on the cross and resurrection? And, how long and tiresome these services can be, when Jesus uttered what He said in a few words, during the course of a meal, Friend to friend!

In reality, Jesus did not ask us to only remember what He did.

Rather, He asked us to remember HIM, as our Lord and friend... "this do in remembrance of me".

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The whole meaning of communion is to remember Jesus. Yes, remember what He did – but the prime reason for communion is to remember HIM, our Friend, Saviour and Lord! Indeed, this is the underlying meaning of the Greek text!

What's the difference? Well, if we mainly remember what He did, we easily can forget Him as a Person, and His true purpose in coming to our sin-ravaged earth.

When we concentrate on the things He did and gave us, we put the emphasis only on what we can get out of Him. Sorry to be so blunt, but it is true.

"In remembrance of ME" (emphasis mine), not "remembrance of things I did".

After all, how many thousands of Jews did He miraculously heal – and if it were possible to find out... how many were actually His true Followers. I suggest very few by comparison!

Invariably we must remember His death and resurrection, but let this come second. Begin with remembering Who He is; praise Him for His character and heart, His will and mind. Let His glorious sacrifice be spoken of second. In this way we obey what Jesus actually said about His own supper. Read Luke 22 again and see if I am right!

God bless God. God bless the Saviour. God bless the Lord Jesus Christ, simply because of Who He is.

Amen."

Though what I said is perfectly clear, it might be that some will think otherwise, as one correspondent has suggested. Hence the clarification...

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The core statement in this message is what Jesus Himself said: "*this do in remembrance of me*". The words are found in a particular context, so here are the words, found in verses 15-20.

1.

"And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

2.

For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

3.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide [it] among yourselves:

4.

For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

5.

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake [it], and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

6.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup [is] the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Jesus said that to remember Him, they must practice the very actions HE was now doing. The actions would represent His coming sacrifice, but all would be done in order to remember *Him*.

The "*thanks*" in this text is eucharisteo. It literally means – to be thankful. This is not what traditionalists make it mean. We must not force a modern meaning onto ancient texts, but must

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let them mean what was written. To do otherwise is to borrow a deceptive leaf from the book of Higher and Lower Critics, who claim to know the 'true meaning' of words better than the original writers!

So, what is the 'true' meaning? It is what it says – giving thanks. It does NOT mean what is suggested by tradition, e.g.: *"He gave thanks for His Body, to be Broken for His people, and for the new covenant believers will enjoy with their Saviour through His Blood."*

No – Jesus gave thanks for the BREAD. The traditional statement is added by modern men! Thanks was customarily given before eating a feast, or any ordinary meal, and this can be witnessed in a number of texts. Jesus was conducting a formal meal associated with the Passover, and so He kept to the Hebraic format that was usual at the time. Hence, He gave thanks to God for the bread and wine. Concerning this – how long does it take to say thank you for something? It should be as long as is necessary, but not thousands of words!

Now, the traditional statement is, in itself, correct as a theological conclusion. But, at the time Jesus spoke, giving us the very first instance of what we now refer to as 'communion', the traditional statement did not come into play. Instead, Jesus was giving a model for future use. He said that when we break the bread, it would represent His body, which would soon be broken for us. The wine would represent His blood, which would soon be spilt for us. However, at the time of the statement, neither was evident because the deeds that led to their truth had not yet been performed by wicked men.

Jesus came to this earth to call His chosen people, the Jews, to repentance. His sacrifice would bring about the salvation of many. He would institute a 'new testament' or arrangement, with mankind, which would later be extended to the Gentiles. Therefore, His sacrifice on the cross is paramount. Even so, we must ALWAYS read scripture as it is written.

This means that the traditional statement above was NOT part of what Jesus said, nor is it what He meant by His "thanks". We can only apply the traditional statement *after* the events Jesus spoke of, because we have the benefit of the full revelation of God in our hands – His Bible. We may not put words into Jesus' mouth, because that is an activity that can lead to serious errors in preaching and study. Jesus was simply thanking God for the actual bread and the actual wine.

Proper Reading of Scripture

I hope you can see what I am doing here? I am commending the proper reading of the words in

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scripture. We must interpret those words as they were written, and not add anything to them, no matter how commendable the additions may be, because such additions are always ex-scripture. The traditional statement above can be used as a theological teaching, but cannot be used as an interpretation of the actual text. What I have said, then, is what Jesus Himself said. I did not go into the exegesis (because it would take us outside interpretation of the actual words). Once we know what a text actually says and means, we can then use that text to speak of its theology. But, the accrued theological statement is NOT an interpretation of the words of the text itself. See what I mean?

Of 'me'... NOT 'of what I did'

Now we can go to the words "*this do in remembrance of me*". What does Jesus mean by this? He means exactly what He said – remember ME! This does NOT mean 'remember everything I am about to do for you'. The words He used are simple and direct. The communion we take part in today should cause us to remember HIM before we remember what HE did. Yes, both are intertwined and cannot be separated, after the events took place. But, at the time, Jesus wanted the apostles to remember HIM as a friend and Master. The symbols of the supper represented His coming sacrifice, which the apostles still did not really grasp. A full understanding only came after the events He spoke of.

Modern believers should not confuse the actual text with any theology that arises from it. The rule is always to find out what the text says, before applying a later theology, even when the theology is absolutely correct. If we do not do this, we will be unable to separate what the Bible says from what we develop as theology.

I have said that Jesus did NOT ask us to do this in remembrance of 'what I did'. Rather, He just said "in remembrance of me". The word "me" is *emos*. This is a pronoun pointing to Himself and what is His. As a pronoun it means nothing else, especially not a trail of theological statements! It is equivalent to an objective genitive.

And so the translation is correct: "*(in remembrance) of me*", which literally means "*in my remembrance*"

. Objectively then, it pertains or relates to the person himself, not to things the person may do, and will do.

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Thus, when Jesus told His apostles to copy what He did with the bread and wine, it was so they would remember HIM. This is why he emphasised "*this do*". 'To do', the verb, ποιεο, in this context, means 'to make' or observe. Make what? Make future communions just like this one.

"In remembrance of me". We are to bring to remembrance, or remember..."me". That is, Jesus Himself. Yes, this will include what He did on the Cross. But, only after this supper. And what He did on the cross would be re-enacted thereafter by believers, during Communion. BUT THE ACTUAL MEANING OF THE WORDS USED IS CLEAR – WE ARE TO REMEMBER

HIM

. First and foremost, we must bring Him to memory: His majesty, His deity, His power, for from these proceed what He did. We must remember Him for

Who

He is, before we can thank Him for what He

did

. To quote Vine's Expository Dictionary:

"In Christ's command in the institution of the Lord's Supper, Luke 22:19; 1Cr 11:24, 25, not "in memory of" but in an affectionate calling of the Person Himself to mind."

Frankly, if our remembrance is not of Christ the *Person*, then the rest we remember will be mechanical and devoid of true feeling for the Lord. Read the text very carefully, for He is not calling us to primarily remember the meal itself, but the Person Who enables us to observe the meal. Yes, memory of the meal will be included, and why it was instituted, but it is second to remembering *Him* as Saviour and Lord.

Just as we begin our usual prayers with praise for God, so we must begin our Communion observation with the memory of Him as our friend and Saviour. Him as a Person.

I have heard far too many 'services' purportedly about Jesus, that concentrate only on what He did for us. All well and good – but first we must remember Who He is, and What He is... God Who came to earth to save the lost. The Cross is HOW He saved us. And Communion is how we on earth *symbolise* what He did. But, it all emanates from Him as a Person. This does not denigrate His sacrifice, nor does it make it of secondary importance in terms of His sacrifice. In this paper 'second' only means second to be mentioned!

As Thayer's Lexicon puts it: "*to call me to remembrance*". Remember Jesus the Saviour before we begin to thank Him for what He did! The remembrance is not primarily of what He did, but of

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the One Who did it. What He did is thus secondary in remembrance in terms of biblical logic. In no way does this diminish the sacrifice of Christ. All it does is to read scripture as it is written, and interpret as the language demands. Only after we have this clear understanding of the language can we apply any theological statement, which is NOT an interpretation of the actual written text.

It has been argued that surely in remembering Him we will also remember what He did. Oh, how good that would be, but the Roman case presents the exact opposite! So do many so-called 'communion services' throughout the world, which ritualise and Pharisaically elaborate upon the simple teaching of the Lord, often using church hierarchies and long, impersonal 'prayers' in the process!

This is why we must interpret the actual text first. When we have done so, we can then allow the theology to flow from the properly interpreted text. And though some may not see it initially, this is precisely what I did in my short message!

As I said in the message:

"In reality, Jesus did not ask us to only remember what He did."

The word 'only' was used for a reason. It implies that what He did and Who He is are two separate but enjoined facts: Jesus did not ask us to ONLY remember His deeds. First, He wants us to remember HIM as a Person. As I have said before, this is very clear. I interpreted the actual words of the text. Theology is second to this task, because it is how mere men describe things done by God, and what He commands. But, scripture itself is divinely inspired and written. Also, personal actions proceed from a person; a person does not proceed from actions. Therefore, actions are secondary to the existence and character of the Person Who causes them. In this text the actions are secondary in the sense that Jesus placed His own emphasis on the matter to hand, and we may not put emphasis on something else, albeit worthy.

Additional Note: Some Reactions

I received just two adverse reactions to this paper. Both seem to veer away from what I said in an effort to teach me a lesson I already know! They related to me, at length, that we cannot

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separate Jesus Himself from what He did. Thus, we cannot separate the death on the cross from His words in this text. Yes, I know. And, I did not suggest or say that; the suggestion is in the minds of the ones reacting.

On occasions I receive comments from Christians who think I should ALWAYS include *everything* concerning the Gospel when writing on particular aspects of it. This usually happens because they are afraid someone will 'miss the point', but it is groundless and annoying, as well as being superfluous. In scripture we do not read each writer repeating all the facts concerning the Gospel if they are intentionally and only dealing with certain aspects of it. It is an absurdity to do so, and that is why the writers of the New Testament did not themselves do it. Rather, they left basic propositions to the readers' knowledge. And if they did not have that knowledge they could ask questions and study.

The same critics insist that we cannot say Jesus' sacrifice is 'second'. They have 'read into' what I said, or, read 'between the lines' of what I did *not* say, so as to satisfy a fear of leaving something out. Nowhere did I say the sacrifice of Jesus is of secondary importance. Rather, I said it comes second in the reading of the specific text I was dealing with. 'Second' does not imply 'inferior' or 'less important'. It merely means – of second mention, and I believe I said that, summarised in the last paragraph at least! (I am sometimes very frustrated when presuppositions take the place of what I actually said – they incur a 'blind spot' in logic at some junctures).

It is obvious from the two reactions that a fear of leaving something out has taken precedence over logic and a reading of what I really said. I actually support what the critics said, but because they expect me to speak in the same way as tradition, they cannot see it. For this reason I have added a few more words to the top of page five, just to make this clear, even though I have said the same thing in different words throughout the paper! Come, let us reason together... properly. Remember - at no time did I say Jesus' sacrifice is of secondary importance.

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