

STEPS TO THE CROSS

Steps to Remembering

Matthew 26:17-35

INTRODUCTION: Considering Jesus' steps toward the cross during the final week of His ministry before His glorious resurrection **offers much in the way of instruction and application to those of us who desire to obey the command of Jesus to take up our cross and follow Him.**

- When Jesus healed Bartimaeus, we come away understanding that as we carry our cross, we do it mindful of the hurting people around us. If Jesus could stop and minister to the sick and hurting people around Him, so can we.
- The same is equally true for those whose needs are not physical but spiritual. Jesus sought the biggest sinner in town, and invited Zacchaeus to trust in Him and find forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus' compassion for the lost calls for us to cast off fear and share the gospel with those who have not yet received life in His name.
- Jesus' righteous anger in the temple reminds us that worship is important to the Father, and it must be offered not just in outward motion or pretense. God desires worship to be offered from our spirit, conducted according to the truth of God's Word, and without selfish ambition or motive.
- Our Lord showed us that He wants us to be watching for and to live in readiness for His second coming. Specifically He is looking to see if each of us is engaged in working for Him and for the Kingdom of God, not as a way to earn salvation but as a way to express gratitude and to use both time and talents for the Lord who gave us both.
- Then Jesus stood still for a season to let us see that carrying our cross is not something we always do alone. He showed us that we need fellowship with our fellow believers and through it, we find the energy, motivation, and perseverance to take another step with our own cross upon our shoulder.
- And Jesus let us see what it looks like when a person genuinely becomes overwhelmed by the love of Christ that they do away with all protocol and cross all boundaries to demonstrate their love for the Savior.

I shared with you last week, that the fact that Jesus took time to be with believing friends, was a point that seriously convicted me. So this week, I have made two appointments to eat a meal with believing friends.

Now I tell you that to kind of gain permission to ask you, **“Which of the steps thus far of Jesus toward the cross has God used to prick your conscience and convict you that there are steps you need to take as a disciple,** as a Christ follower that

- **steps you are not taking,**
- **or not taking often,**
- **or not taking well?**

If you are taking notes, there is a place for you to answer this question.

If you are not taking notes, you still need to answer this question in your mind.

And the follow up question is, “And what did you do in response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit?” You know the Spirit does not convict us because He likes to make us feel bad. He convicts us to move us to repent and to change.

So what did you do to respond to the Spirit’s convicting?

If the answer is, “Nothing,” I pray the Spirit will be gracious to renew His conviction and allow you another opportunity to obey.

Folks, sometimes people will tell me, “The Holy Spirit just does not move me like He used to!”

- One of the reasons that happens is because we didn’t respond so many times when He did move and He did convict our hearts in days gone by.
- And we felt the conviction, and we felt guilty for a few minutes, but we did nothing about it.
- We may have said a quick, “God I’m sorry.” But we did not really repent, which means going a different direction. We just let it slide.

So maybe the Holy Spirit is not moving in your life like He once did because you don’t ever do anything about it.

Or maybe He is still moving, speaking, convicting, but your lack of obedience has made you insensitive to the Spirit’s voice. The solution is the same. Get on your knees, and say, “God, I repent of my failure to obey when the Spirit spoke. Holy Spirit, if You will speak to me today, I will obey!”

The steps Jesus took toward the cross to save us from our sins were steps of obedience, sacrificial obedience that Jesus took in response to His Heavenly Father. Our purpose in looking at those steps is to consider our own steps as followers of Christ who have been commanded to take up our cross and follow Him.

- Our purpose is not to merely gain more information about what our Savior did during Holy Week.

- Or even to understand more clearly why He did those things or what their significance was.
- Our purpose is to reorder our own steps to walk more in lock-step with the one we call Lord.
- For if Jesus really is Lord, we desire to obey Him.

Now, this morning we talk about the steps Jesus took on Thursday of Holy Week. So today we will look intently at the Lord's Supper which Jesus gave to His disciples on Thursday night. That might seem strange since we are not taking the supper this morning. Next Sunday morning, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. Why then should we talk about the supper today?

The first reason is that we are examining the steps Jesus took toward the cross in the order that Jesus took those steps.

The second reason is that when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we often do not have time to get into great detail nor extensive consideration of the meaning of the supper itself. We are going to do that today, so that when we come together for worship next Sunday, with the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a part of our worship, we will be prepared to participate by remembering the meaning of this ritual meal the Lord commanded us to eat.

There is no question that the entire week before He died, the mind of Jesus was focused upon the cross. When Mary anointed Him in that beautiful act of love and worship on Wednesday, Jesus said that she was already preparing His body for burial.

Now **on Thursday**, His disciples came to Him and asked where they should make preparation to eat the Passover meal. This Passover would be the last Passover His disciples would eat. That night, as **Jesus ate the Passover that celebrated God's redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt**, Jesus would give it a whole new meaning. The new meal and the new meaning would all center on the cross. Let us read Matthew's account of the day.

Matthew 26:17–35 NKJV

17 Now on the first *day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." ' " 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. ...26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of

this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ...

The celebration of the Passover was a strictly kept and sacred ritual for the Jews. There were traditionally many items that were set upon the table as a part of the Passover meal, and each one had a significance. As Jesus planned the transformation of this celebration of deliverance from bondage to Egypt to a celebration of deliverance from bondage to sin and to death, there were many items on the table from which to choose.

Some of the things that were a part of the Passover meal were

- **unleavened bread**
- **four cups of grape juice (probably also unleavened)**
- **a bowl of paste called charosheth** (a mixture of mashed dates, apples, pomegranates, and nuts that pictured the clay used by the Hebrew slaves to make bricks for Pharaoh)
- **a plate of bitter herbs** to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery, and
- **a bowl of salt water** as a remembrance of their tears.
- The most important item on the table though was **the roasted lamb**. The lamb reminded them of the lamb slain by each family, the blood of which was smeared upon the door posts and lintels of their homes, so that when death descended upon all the firstborn dwelling in the land of Egypt, it would pass over those who were covered by the blood. That is why it was called the Passover. Because the blood made death pass over them!

From these elements, Jesus picked two for the Lord's Supper. Unleavened bread and a cup of grape juice.

I. WHY THE BREAD?

A. The bread itself means that God became human.

John 6:48-51 NKJV 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. (Pointing to Himself, Jesus said,) 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

B. The lack of leaven means the Son of Man lived a perfect, sinless life.
Leaven, or yeast in the Scriptures represent evil and sin.

Hebrews 4:15 NKJV For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.

- C. The breaking of the bread means that the Son of God humbled Himself, even to the point of a humiliating death on the cross.**

Philippians 2:8 NKJV And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

- D. Eating the bread means that by grace through faith, the Living Christ has come into our lives.**

Revelation 3:20 NKJV Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

II. WHY THE CUP?

- A. The cup means that Jesus, the Lamb of God, shed His blood to pay the penalty for our sins.** If bread had to be unfermented, without yeast, because it represented the body of Christ, don't you think the liquid in the cup representing the blood would be unfermented? Oinos in the New Testament refers to both fermented and unfermented grape juice: wine or fresh grape juice.

Hebrews 9:22 NKJV And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

- B. The cup means the new covenant has come.**

God had promised a new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah that would replace the Covenant of the Law.

Jeremiah 31:31–33 NKJV 31 “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Matthew 26:27-28 NKJV 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

- C. Drinking the cup means that when we trust Christ, by grace through faith, we have entered into that new covenant with God.**

Ephesians 2:8 NKJV For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,*

III. WHY NOT THE LAMB?

A. Because Jesus is the Lamb.

John 1:29 NKJV The next day John (the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

B. Because there is only One Lamb of God, sacrificed one time.

1. Each Passover many lambs were sacrificed, and new ones every year.
2. But the Lamb of God only needed to be sacrificed one time.

Paul, talking about the death of Jesus, said,

Romans 6:10 NKJV For *the death* that He died, **He died to sin once for all;** but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.

In Hebrews, Paul writes of Jesus, soon after the resurrection, carrying His blood into heaven's throne room, and he says,

Hebrews 9:12 NKJV Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place **once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption.

Then again in Hebrews, Paul says

Hebrews 10:10 NKJV ... we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

3. This is a key difference between the Catholic Mass and the biblical practice of the Lord's Supper.

Now folks, I am not a Catholic basher; and if any of you are now or have been a part of that tradition, I have no desire to be an enemy. But it is important to recognize the differences between different traditions of belief and practice when they are significant. This difference is significant, and we should understand it.

- The Catholic encyclopedia officially labels the mass "The Sacrifice of the Mass."
- It explains that the mass is in reality a true sacrifice that offers up to God His only Son, over and over again.

- That is the reason the Catholic Church insists that the bread and the cup do not merely represent the body and blood of Christ but actually become Christ's body and blood, so it is a real sacrifice.
- Jesus pointedly avoided this error when He established the supper by omitting the lamb that would be slain over and over again.

4. Jesus did not tell us to sacrifice over and over again as a part of the supper; He told us to remember the sacrifice He had already made.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 NKJV 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**" 25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, **in remembrance of Me.**"

CONCLUSION: There are some who need to make what is pictured in the Lord's Supper a reality in your life. You need to trust Jesus as your Savior who died to pay your sin debt and as your Lord who you begin to follow and obey.

Some time ago my wife showed me a cute child's T-shirt with a picture of Lucy instructing Linus.

She said, "**Yesterday is the past.**

Tomorrow is the future.

Today is a gift.

That is why they call it the present."

Today is a gift. The Bible says today is the day of salvation. It is God's gift to you, and the only time you can receive the gift is in the present.