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THE MEAL THAT HEALS

Many years ago I heard a teaching about how the sacrament of Communion is meant by God not only to remind us of the love and sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but it is also meant to bring deep healing, both emotional and physical, to those who receive it with faith. Then recently evangelist Perry Stone wrote a book with the above title, The Meal That Heals. I believe this is a subject that has been lost or ignored by the church and that we will be blessed if we hear and receive it. Let me briefly lay out the foundation of this revelation:

When Jesus died on the cross, He was fulfilling the prophecy first established by God in the Passover (in the book of Exodus), when each family killed a lamb without blemish and sprinkled its blood on each side and on top of the doorway of their home so that the angel of death would “pass over” their home. Christ became our Lamb and took all our sins upon Himself on the cross, and He shed His blood to save us from eternal death and separation from God.

But let me point out something about the way sheep die. They die silently and without protest. When I was attending high school and college, I worked during the summers at either the Swift & Co. or Armour & Co. packing houses. In north Fort Worth, where I was born and raised, there were these huge meat packing houses next to the Fort Worth Stockyards. Each year, thousands of cows, pigs, and sheep were slaughtered, processed, and shipped from these giant factories. On occasion I went up to the seventh floor, the slaughter floor. The animals were led up the long ramps by a “Judas-goat.” Cattle were killed with a hammer with a long handle. They simply fell to the floor where their throats were cut. (Sorry for the graphic description.) Hogs were attached by hind hoof to a 30-foot high wheel, and as they were lifted their throats were cut and they squealed and thrashed terribly. For sheep, their throats were cut where they stood, and they simply stood still, trembled, and bled to death. The Bible says about Jesus, *As a sheep before its shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth*. A sheep that is being shorn, or being slaughtered, opens not its mouth.

Where are we going with all of this? If a lamb dies without a complaint, as Jesus did for us, and if the blood of the Lamb was shed to save us from eternal death, then what was the meaning of all the physical and emotional torture that Jesus endured, as was so graphically portrayed in The Passion of the Christ? Why the scourging with whips, the beating, the crown of thorns, the taunting and shaming?

Because, while our salvation was paid for by the blood of a dead Lamb, our healing was purchased by a living and suffering Savior: *By His stripes we are healed.*

All of this was foretold 700 years before the birth of Christ by Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 53:

1. *He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquity.* This speaks of spiritual healing and is related to the forgiveness of sins.
2. *The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.* This speaks of emotional healing for the mind and soul.
3. *With His stripes we are healed.* This refers to physical healing for the body.

What is the benefit for us of knowing about this? Perry Stone, Dr. Ed Smith, and others report that in churches where these truths are regularly taught, it is not uncommon for people to be emotionally and/or physically healed during the service of Communion.

Also, Perry Stone reports that he has seen people healed of profound illnesses when they took Communion daily. Of course, this is not a magical formula, but a sacred moment between you and your heavenly Father. It should be done reverently and in faith in the God who is our Savior, Healer, and Deliverer.

I believe that because of the love and sacrifice of our beloved Savior, communion is indeed “the meal that heals.” I encourage you to teach your friends to go to each Communion Service, and as you receive the juice or wine, remember that it represents the blood of the Lamb and is for our salvation. As you receive the bread, remember that it represents the body

of the Lord, and His body was broken for our healing. By His stripes we are healed. Each time you receive the elements of Communion, anticipate and believe for healing. Jesus paid the price by His suffering and death. We can, by faith, receive the wonderful benefit.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM US MOST OF ALL?

As we read through the Bible, particularly the New Testament, we are constantly told that God created us for relationship and that there are things He wants from us. In your understanding, what is at the top of the list? That is, what does God want from you and me above anything else? Consider the following list and make your pick:

Fruitfulness, Obedience, Submission, Trust, Love, Service, Fear/Respect/Awe, Thanksgiving, Holiness, Righteousness, Faithfulness, Self-control.

Everything on this list is declared in the Bible to be something that God demands, requires, desires, wants from us in our relationship with Him, but as I am sure you know, *The greatest of these is love*. As you also know, there are several words for love in the New Testament, and what God wants from us is what Jesus defined by His life among us: **agape**. This kind of love includes within itself everything mentioned in the above list and a lot more.

Way back in His revelation to Moses, 1,500 years before Jesus' birth, God told His people exactly what He wanted from them: *Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart, you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.....*

These verses have been known in Jewish tradition for centuries as "The Shema," and they are recited daily by faithful Jews along with Deut. 11:13-21 and Num. 15:37-41. (I suggest you look up these Scriptures and think about them.)

Jesus was a faithful Jew, and He came to fulfill all of the prophecies and promises in the Old Testament. When a scribe asked Jesus, *Which is the first commandment of all?* Jesus responded by quoting, and modifying, the Shema: *Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.'* (Mark 12:29-3. This account is also found in Matthew 22 and Luke 10.) Remember that in most of the other world religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Animism, etc.), one's relationship with their god has no connection or an ill-defined connection with morality and ethics; that is, with the way you treat your neighbor. The Sermon on the Mount is as high above these other religions as the heavens are above the earth.

Jesus constantly expanded our understanding of what it means to love God and our neighbors by His life, ministry, and teachings (for instance, the Beatitudes found in Matt. 5:3-12). The Apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, explains further in his so-called love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13. He even says that though we might have all kinds of supernatural gifts (tongues, prophecy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, miracles), and though we pour out our lives in sacrificial giving to the poor, if we don't have love it all adds up to a big zero with God! In fact, it is worse than zero, it is all *like sounding brass or a clanging cymbal* (which are just making a lot of noise and calling attention to themselves).

Many years ago I heard of a woman missionary in China. She lived in a mansion up on a mountain. Each morning she had the coolies carry her sedan chair down to the squalid village where she spent the day bestowing donated food and medicine to poor, sick folks. She never interacted with them or treated them with love and respect. At the end of each day she was carried back up the mountain. Compare her attitude with that of Mother Teresa.

I think it was six years ago when Fred Feller, Lynne Cumming, and I went to Leticia, Columbia, on the Amazon, on a ministry trip. The final meeting was on a Sunday night, and several hundred people gathered in the public square. Since most of the people came on buses that stopped running at 10:30 PM, the missionary asked the man and woman who were leading worship to end by about 9:00 PM so that we would have plenty of time for the message and for personal ministry. What we did not know is that both the man and woman were from Leticia and were regarded locally sort of like rock stars. They strutted around the stage, and after each performance the audience screamed and applauded for more. The two performers would not stop. Jaime, the missionary, was waving at them, pointing at his watch, imploring them to stop so that we could preach the Word. They ignored him and kept going until about 10:15, so that the majority of people had to run to catch their buses and were not there for preaching and personal ministry.

Each of us has the potential of doing our "ministry," whatever it is, as a performance, purposed to titillate the audience and reflect glory on ourselves, rather than to please an audience of One.

So, the question for each of us is: Do we really love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and do we love our neighbor as we love ourselves? Do we love Him more than we love our spouse and children? Jesus said in Luke 14:26 that if we don't "hate" our family – in comparison to our love for God – then we can't be His disciples.

Are we being obedient to God's clear commandments in the Bible and in our own consciences? If we are clinging to some offense from the past and not forgiving, then we are not walking in love. If we have surrendered to our addiction of alcohol, drugs, or sexual sins, rather than doing the hard work of repentance and a pure life, then we are not walking in love.

Do we really trust money (job, savings, investments) more than we do God? God declares that the first 10% of our income belongs to Him and that if we honor that standard God will bless us, and if we do not do so we will be under a curse. God does not curse us, He simply states that the consequences of our disobedience and rebellion will be a curse. In the richest nation on earth, the giving of church-going Christians averages about 2%. If you ask people why they don't give a tithe, the standard answer is, "We can't afford it." That illustrates the curse. You will never be able to "afford" it. Tithing breaks the hold of fear and the control of money and allows God to prove to us that He is faithful.

A few months ago I visited with a young man (about 40) who, with his wife and children, are serving our church as missionaries in Asia. (I cannot give his name or location.) He is serving in an extremely sensitive place and said that if he had not given up his American citizenship and become a citizen in the nation where he is serving, that he would have been expelled from the country along with all the other missionaries. As it is, he said that all his adopted country can do is to allow him to go on with his work, imprison him, or execute him. These latter two options are real possibilities at any time. I asked about his health and he told me that he is not getting enough rest, not because of worry, but because on most nights he lies awake for many hours with his heart burning with love for the Lord and for the young women that he and his wife are rescuing from a horrible life.

I read somewhere that there is room in our hearts for only one passion. Is the passion in your heart a burning love for the Lord and for people, or is it a passion for something else? Do you really love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?

THE MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS

In his book, Under Cover, John Bevere writes about what the New King James Version calls "The mystery of lawlessness" in 2 Thess. 2:7. Let me outline his teaching:

- In chapter 3 & 4 of 2 Timothy, Paul warns that, *In the last days perilous times will come...* and it is clear that these terrible times will come not because of something external like persecution but because of deception in the church. For instance, the church will turn away from holiness, obedience, listening to Scripture, and will start loving the wrong things, living in a way to please themselves, and will reject sound doctrine.
- James 1:22 says, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
- Paul told us that many will be deceived *because they did not receive the love of the truth.* (2 Th. 2:10) To love the truth is not just to enjoy hearing it, but to love obeying it.
- Jesus says at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7), *Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand* (and when the storm came the house was destroyed).
- **First, then, the "Mystery of Lawlessness" is that when a person hears the teaching, words, commandments, instruction of the Lord and does not do them, he immediately becomes deceived.** He starts rationalizing: "Well, I don't think we are supposed to interpret this teaching literally. That would be too legalistic. People would laugh at me and think I was a fanatic if I started to do that. Besides, I don't see other people in the church doing that. Etc."
- **Second, the "Mystery of Lawlessness" is that if a person sins in some way and does not immediately repent and turn away from that sin, he immediately becomes deceived.**

Ex: Remember that when Eve listened to the serpent she became deceived. The serpent said to her, *You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.* (Gen. 3) So she took some of that fruit, looked at it (and nothing happened), ate it (and nothing happened physically that she could see), so she gave some to her husband and he ate it. And they fell from their exalted position into fear and shame. And into life on earth came hatred, strife, gossip, moral corruption, war, etc.

- Ex. Remember how people become enslaved to their sins. The sequence is: Temptation – Sin – Habit – Addiction – Bondage – Death. We reason that since we feel so much pressure to (drink, take drugs, commit a sexual sin, go to the casino, etc.) then if we will just do it once the pressure will be off. But that is not the way it works. The second time is

easier than the first, and so the sequence continues into slavery and death. People descend to the place where their addiction is in control, they have lost their freedom to stop doing it, and they come to a place of moral insanity and self-destruction. We have all seen photos of what happens over a period of time to someone addicted to cocaine or meth.

The good news, my friends, is that the Lord Jesus can give us the desire and the ability to do God's will. (Phil. 2:13) He has come to rescue us. Give Him a chance.

YOU CAN'T BE A HEALER AND BE IN A HURRY!

Bobby Schuler (Hour of Power, on TBN on Saturday evenings) says that you can't be a healer and be in a hurry. He shared an amazing story that occurred a few years ago in a city on the East Coast.

A group of sociologists conducted a test. In their city was a large seminary of several thousand students. With the cooperation of the seminary, they announced that they were going to give free preaching evaluations and asked for volunteers, and several hundred students volunteered.

They told the students that they would be tested on a short sermon they would give in a recording studio. The subject they were given was the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (A man was wounded and left on the side of the road. A priest and Levite saw him but passed by on the other side, etc.)

As each student came at his assigned time to be recorded, he was met at an address down town. The instructor said to him, "The recording studio is just down our back alley a half a block to a blue door. The people are waiting to record your message, and you are a little late, you had better hurry." One by one, the students hurried down the alley, but lying in front of the door was a homeless man with blood running from his wounds (apparently). Nine out of ten of the students (90%) stepped over the wounded man and hurried inside to preach a sermon about the Good Samaritan!

Do you and I have time to see the people we encounter every day, to see their wounds and hurting hearts, or are we in a hurry?

Warning: Last week in the "Letters to the Editor" of The Daily Sentinel a man wrote about a homeless lady who stood every day at the stop sign by the Gold's Gym in Clifton with the standard cardboard sign saying that she needed food. I have seen her there and periodically have given her a few dollars, as has my sister. The letter writer went on to say that recently he stayed in his car and watched this woman. After a while she left the corner, went to a convenience store and purchased lottery tickets.

Point: We must be compassionate and generous, but we must also be wise in our giving.

God Bless

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