

The Feast of the Lord

A Sermon

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Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON,

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"For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."—1 Cor. 11:26.

I THINK we cannot too often explain the meaning of the two great Christian ordinances—baptism and the Supper of the Lord; for it is essential to our profiting by them that we understand them. If we do not know what they mean, they certainly cannot convey to us any blessing whatever. They are not mere channels of grace in themselves, apart from our understanding being exercised, and our hearts being moved by them. Very soon the best ordinance in the world will become a mere form, and will even degenerate into superstitious practice, unless it be understood; and we must not always take it for granted that the meaning of the simplest emblem is understood. Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little, must still be the motto of the Christian minister. We must explain, explain, and explain again, or else men will satisfy themselves with the outward form, and not reach to the teaching which the forms were intended to convey. Our text deals with the supper of our Lord, and we will read it again. "As often as eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."

The first point of the text is *what we do*—we "show." Then, *what do we show, and how?* And then, *who show it*—"ye do show the Lord's death." And then, *when?*—"as often"—"till he come." First, then, when we come to the Lord's table:—

I. WHAT WE DO.

We "show." That word has two or three meanings. They all melt into one, but we shall get at it better by dividing it. It is meant here by showing Christ's death that *we declare it*. When the emblems are placed upon the table—bread and wine and we gather around it, we declare our firm belief that Jesus, the Son of God, descended into this world and died as a sacrifice for sin upon the arose. It has been found that if a great event is to be kept in mind in succeeding ages, there must be some memorial of it. Men by degrees forget it, and even come to be dubious as to whether such an event did occur. Sometimes a stone has been set up—a monument—but this has not always been most effective. God, when he would have the children of Israel remember that he brought them out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, did not bid them set up a monument, but he ordained a ceremony

which was to be practiced on a certain day. It was called "The Passover," and the slaughter of the lamb and the eating of it became a yearly declaration by the people of Israel that they believed that God brought their fathers up out of the house of bondage. So effective has this been that men have often used the same device. When the Jewish people escaped from the plot which was laid by Haman, through the wisdom of Mordecai and Esther, they ordained the keeping of the feast of Purim, that they might have in perpetual memory the goodness of God towards his people.

And you know how, in our own English history and in the history of other countries, certain rites and ceremonies have been ordained in order that there might be a perpetual memorial, a declaration made that such and such a thing did occur. Now that more than eighteen hundred years ago Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, died upon Calvary by crucifixion, we do here protest and declare. We set forth again to a world that is skeptical and denies the fact which is its brightest hope—we set forth our confident belief that so it was; and as long as this ordinance shall be celebrated, there shall be a standing proof in the world that that was the case.

But to set forth means more than to declare. It signifies, in the next place *to represent*. There is in the Lord's Supper a representation of the death of Christ. Men, when they have found an event to be interesting and remarkable, have often devised ways of representing it to the people that they might understand it.

With regard to our Lord's death, there are some who hang up pictures on the wall; they think the use of the crucifix and so on to be proper. I find no teaching of that kind in the Word of God. I do find that too often such things lead to idolatry. And what shall we say of these miracle-plays which, even in these modern times, have been carried out, in which the death of our Lord Jesus Christ is travestied? They seem to be shocking to the Christian mind. But here, in a very simple manner, you have God's own appointed way of representing to ourselves and to onlookers the death of our Lord. This is the Christian's "show"—we *show* the death of Christ here by a divine appointment. I shall, farther on, show how it is so, and that the breaking of bread and the pouring forth of wine—the use of those two emblems—is a most telling, most suggestive, most instructive method of representing the death of Christ. There are two other ways of representing it—the one the pencil of the evangelist which has drawn the death of Christ in the Word of God; the other is the preaching of the gospel. It is the preacher's business to set forth Christ crucified—evidently crucified among you. The three ways that God has ordained of representing the death of Christ are the Word read, the Word preached, and this blessed ordinance of the Supper of the Lord.

To "show." This means to declare, to testify; and it means also to represent. But it has a third meaning; it means also *to hold forth*, to make manifest, to publish, to call attention to. Now it has been a matter of fact that when the Jesuit missionaries went to China and converted a great many to what they called the Christian faith, they never mentioned the fact

that Christ died. For years they concealed it, lest the people should be shocked. Now we, on the other hand, put that first and foremost. We have no other Christianity than this, that Christ died and rose again, and we cannot come to the Lord's table without showing it. The Jesuit could, because it would puzzle the wisest man to see the death of Christ in the Mass. He might sit and look at a hundred Masses before he knew what it meant. But the moment we gather around this table and break bread, and pour out wine, whoever asks us, "What mean ye by this ordinance? the answer is prompt—the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err in this—"We set forth to you that Jesus died." "God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are not ashamed of a crucified Saviour. We have heard of some in these days who are always preaching a glorified Christ. We wish them such success as their ministry is likely to bring; but for us we preach a crucified Christ—"Christ and him crucified"; for it is here, after all, that the salvation of the sinner lies. Christ glorified is precious enough—oh! how unspeakably precious to a soul that is saved!—but first and foremost to a dying world it is Christ upon the cross that we have to declare. And, therefore, when we come to the Communion table we do three things. We assert the fact that Jesus died; we represent that fact in emblem, and then we thus press it upon the attention of men. We desire them to observe it; we ask them to mark it; we tell them that this is the sum and substance of all the gospel that we were sent to preach, "God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation for our sins."

Thus I have opened up the meaning of the word to "show." This is what we do. Now the second point is, my brethren:—

II. WHAT WE SHOW, AND HOW

It is said in the text, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death." How do we show it? What do we show? Well, first of all, we show that *God has set forth Christ for men*. The table is spread; there is bread on it; there is the cup upon it. What for? Not for beasts. Here is the food of men. It is set there for men. It is intended that the bread should be eaten, that the wine should be drunk. Everybody who sees a table spread knows at once that there are preparations for a meal or a festival. Now God has set forth Christ for men. There is in Christ what man wants. As bread meets his hunger, as the cup meets his thirst, so Christ meets all the spiritual wants of mankind. And the soul that would live, and the soul that would rejoice, must come to God's provision for his living and his rejoicing, and that provision is to be found in Jesus Christ crucified. God set forth Christ of old. Even in the garden, he set him forth in the first promise. He continued to set him forth by all the prophets, and in this last day every veil has been taken away by an open Bible inviting all comers. God has set forth the bread of life to the sons of men. And you tonight will show that fact. When you see that table uncovered, you have a representation. God has made a feast of fat things for the sons of men in the person of Jesus Christ. The feast consists of bread and wine. Now in this we represent Christ's human person, Christ's humanity.

That he is no myth, but real flesh, is taught by the bread being on the table—that he was no phantom, but that real blood coursed through his veins as through ours—that the Lord of life and glory was, like ourselves, a real man, in humanity in all respects like to ourselves, sin alone excepted. There shall be no phantom feast upon the table, and the materialism that is there is meant to show that he was a man, a real man

"Who once on Calvary died,
When streams of blood and water ran
Down from his wounded side."

But the next thing we show forth is *his death*. We have his person; then we have his death—observe how. Recording to the Romish Church, the most of the people are only to participate in the bread—the wafer. Now such persons never show Christ's death at all, for the text says, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye show Christ's death." It is only by the two that you show his death at all. The bread represents the body, but the cup must represent the blood, or else you have no token of his suffering—no emblem of his death. Cannot the two be mixed together? No, for if the blood and flesh be together, you have the living man. It is when the blood flows—when the lifeblood ebbs from the body, and the body is bloodless, that then you have the wine as a token of death; and the separation of the two—the use of the two emblems—is absolutely needful to set forth death. The more you think this the more you see in it. The emblem is the simplest in the world, but yet the most instructive. Take either one of the elements—the bread, how it typifies Christ's suffering! Here was the corn bruised beneath the thresher's flail; then was it cast into the ground. It sprung up and ripened, and had to be cut down with the sickle; then it had to be threshed; then ground in the mill; then was it baked in the oven. A whole series of sufferings, if I may use the term, it had to pass through before it became proper food for us. And so must our Saviour pass through sufferings innumerable before he could become food for our souls, and redeemer of our spirits. As for that which is in the cup, it was trodden beneath the foot in the wine-pressits juice was pressed forth. So in the wine-press of Jehovah's wrath was Christ pressed before he could become the wine that maketh glad both God and man. Both emblems represent suffering, each one separately, but put together they bring forth the idea of death, "and as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death."

But more than this; we show that God set forth Christ; we show his person as a real man; we show his sufferings and his death; but next we show *our participation in the same*, for it is not "as often as ye *look* at this bread," or "as ye *gaze* upon this cup," but "as often as ye *eat* this bread and drink this cup." Christ saves us not until we do receive him by an act of faith. The bread satisfies no hunger while it rests upon the table, and a draught from the cup quenches no thirst until it really is drunk. So the precious blood of Jesus Christ our Saviour must be received by our faith. We must believe in him to the saving of our souls. Now how simple a matter is eating! It matters not, unless a man be dead—he wants little teaching

to know how to eat. It is as simple as a natural act—he puts food into his mouth. It is just so here. There is the Saviour, and I take him—that is all. It seems to me to be even a more complex act to eat than simply to trust in Jesus, yet is it a very simple thing. The idiot can eat. No matter how guilty a man, he can eat; no matter how dark and despairing his fears, he can eat; and O poor soul, whoever thou mayest be, there shall be no want of wit or merit that shall keep thee back from Christ. If thou art willing to have him, thou mayest have him. The act of trusting Christ makes Christ as much thy own as the eating of the bread. Suppose some difficulty were raised about whether a piece of bread was mine. Well, the legal question would take a long time to decide. I cannot produce the document, nor find the witnesses to prove it is mine. But there is one little fact, I think, which will settle it—I have eaten it. So if the devil himself were to say that Christ is not mine, I have believed on him; and if I have believed on him, he is mine just as surely as when I have eaten a piece of bread there can be no question about its being mine. Now we set forth to-night, by eating bread and drinking of the cup, the fact that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and we take him by simple faith to be our all in all.

But there is more teaching still. The bread and wine, are being eaten and drunk, are assimilated into the system; they minister strength to bone, sinew, muscle; they build up the man. And herein is teaching. *Christ believed in is one with us*—"Christ in us the hope of glory. "We have heard persons talk of believers falling from grace and losing Christ. No, sir, a man has eaten bread—he ate it yesterday. Will you separate that bread from the man? Will you trace the drops that came from the cup, and fetch them out of the man's system? You shall more easily do that than you shall take Christ away from the soul that has once fed upon him. "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" He is in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life. See then how large a letter Christ has written to us with these pens—how in this bread and this wine, eaten and drunk, he has taught us wondrous mysteries—in fact, the whole Christian faith is, in brief, summed up here upon this table.

And now we must remark upon what it is we show forth, and how we do it. *We do this very simply*. Certain churches must go about this business in a very mysterious manner—a great deal of machinery is wanted—a plate becomes a paten, and a cup becomes a chalice, and a table, ah! that has vanished and turned into an altar. The whole thing is turned topsy-turvy until it is very questionable in the Church of Rome whether there is any supper at all; for if you introduce the altar, you have put away the table and done away with the whole thing. It is another ordinance, and not the ordinance which Christ established. One would suppose that when the Apostles first went out to preach, if the religion of the Romish Church be that of the Scripture, they would have needed, each of them, a wagon to carry with them the various paraphernalia necessary for the celebration of their services. But here, wherever there is a piece of bread, and wherever there is a cup, we have the plain, but instructive em-

blems which our Saviour bade us use. "He took bread and break it. "He did drink of the cup, and passed it to his disciples, and said, "Drink ye all of it."

Let us keep this ordinance in its pure simplicity. Let us never add anything to it by our own devising by way of fancying that we are honouring God by garnishing his table. Let us plainly show Christ's death, and as we do it plainly *we should also do it festively*. Is it not delightful to reflect that our Lord has not ordained a mournful ceremony in which to celebrate his death: it is a feast. You would suppose by the way that some come that it is a funeral, but it is a feast, and joy becomes a feast; and when, according to the example of Christ, we recline at our ease in the nearest approach to the posture in which the Oriental lay along at the table, and when we come with joyful heart, blessing the Lord Jesus that though our sins put him to death, yet his death has put to death our sins, then it is that we celebrate his death as he would have us celebrate it—not as an awful tragedy, in which we try to provoke our indignation against the Romans or the Jews, but as a hallowed festival, in which the King himself comes to the table, and his spikenard gives forth a sweet smell, and our spirit is refreshed.

And once more, this way of showing Christ's death is *one of communion*. Now one person cannot do it; many must come together. Ye must eat and drink together to celebrate this, your Lord's death. And is not this delightful, for in this cup we have fellowship with him and with one another? We, being many, have one bread; we, being many, have one cup—one family at one table with one common head, the Lord Jesus, who is all in all to us. Oh! I bless his name that whereas he might have ordained a way of our showing his death which would have been mournful, or a way which would have been solitary, he has selected that which is joyful, and that which is full of good fellowship, so that saints below and himself can meet together in the festival of love and show his death until he come, in the breaking of bread and the pouring forth of wine. Thus I have tried to show what it is we show, and how we show it. Now thirdly:—

III. WHO ARE TO SHOW IT?

Who show it? "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death." The "ye," then includes all the saints of God—all who come to the table, who eat this bread and drink this cup; and truly a very pleasing thought arises from this. Here is a way of showing Christ's death in which all who love Christ have a share. You cannot all show it from the pulpit; gifts are not equally distributed; but you all alike share in this showing of his death—in this special way, which he himself celebrated for our example, and which he delivered to his servant Paul, expressly that it might stand on record. Now if Paul himself were here, he could not show Christ's death alone at the Lord's Supper. He must ask some of his poorer brethren to come with him. If the minister of a church should be full of the Holy Ghost, yet could he not show forth Christ's death here in this peculiar way. He must say to his brethren, "Come, brethren and sisters; it says 'ye,' as often as ye eat this bread and

drink this cup." Here we are to-night, as we sit here, all brought into a blessed equality in the act of using the same outward sign, and of performing the Master's will in the same way.

"But," says one "doth every man who comes to the table, and eats and drinks, show Christ's death? Notice how the verse which follows my text puts a bar to that. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of this bread." It must be taken for granted that the man has examined himself—that he comes there as a true believer in Jesus—that he comes there with the full intent to show Christ's death; and if he does that, such a man is showing Christ's death. I am very earnest, dear brethren and sisters, as it has been a long time since I have met with you—having been kept away so long by sickness, though I have been with my brethren below stairs—I am anxious that we should indeed show Christ's death to-night. Let us do it to ourselves. I find that the text may either be read in the indicative or in the imperative mood. It is either "ye show Christ's death," as our version has it, or it may be "show ye Christ's death"—it is an exhortation. Oh! let us take care that we show it to ourselves. "Show it to ourselves?" says one. Yes, it is meant for you. This is a primary meaning of the text. When you take that bread, don't think of the bread, and stay there, but say to your own soul, "My soul, think thou of Jesus. My heart, go away now to Gethsemane. Come, ye stray thoughts; Come, ye passing vanities, begone! I must away to where my Saviour bled and died.

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing
Which, before his cross, I spend."

I have come here to show his death; let me see him. I will ask him to permit me in spirit to put my finger into the print of the nails, and to put my hand into his side. Oh! go not from this table satisfied with the outward emblem; press into the inner court—pray the Master to manifest himself to you as he does not unto the world. For here is the main business—show his death to your own heart till your heart bleeds for sin; show it to your own faith till your faith feels it is all sufficient—show it to others. You will be sure to show it to others if you show it to yourself for as others look on and mark your reverent behaviour; if they cannot enter into your joy, they will be reminded of what they have so long forgotten. Oh! brethren and sisters, let me urge each one of you that no one should be content without sharing this honour. I feel we all have an honour to participate in showing forth the death of Christ. Let us not, in sharing the honour, bring condemnation on ourselves. But I must hasten on. The fourth point is:—

IV. WHEN ARE WE TO DO IT?

The text says "often"—"as often as ye eat this bread." The Holy Spirit might have used the words "when ye eat," but he did not. He teaches us by implication that we ought to do it often. I do not think there is any positive law about it, but it looks to me as if the first Christians broke bread almost every day—"breaking bread from house to house." I am not sure that that refers to Communion, but in all probability it does. This much is certain, that

in the early Church the custom was to break bread in memory of Christ's passion on the first day of every week, and it was always a part of the Sabbath's service when they came together to remember their Lord in this way. How it can be thought right to leave the celebrating of this ordinance to once a year or once a quarter I cannot understand, and it seems to me that if brethren knew the great joy there is in often setting forth Christ's death they would not be content with even once a month. But I leave that.

The other mark of time in the text is "till he come." Then this service is to end. There will be no more Lord's Suppers when Christ appears, because they will be needless. Put out the candle—the sun has risen. Put away the emblem—here comes Christ himself. But until he does come, this will always be a most fitting ordinance. I pleased myself with a thought I met with the other day. Our Lord Jesus Christ sat at the table and ate with his disciples, and he took the cup and he sipped it, and he passed it round. It is being passed round still. It has not got round the table yet, it is being passed on. For 1,800 years it has been passed from hand to hand. They have not all drunk yet; and you remember he, said, "Drink ye all of it"—all of you. Did he speak to all his elect that were to be born—to all the countless companies yet to come? I think he did, and it is going round: and by-and-bye, when all the people of God have participated in Christ, it will cease. The cup will never be emptied till then.

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more."

When the last has drunk of it, what then? It will come back into the Master's hands, and then will be fulfilled that word of his, "I say unto you I will not henceforth drink of the juice of the vine till I drink it new in my heavenly Father's kingdom." And it is going round, brethren—that cup of glorious Christian fellowship of love to Christ, the cup that is filled with Jesus' blood—it is passing round, and when it has reached his hand then we shall need no more the outward ordinance. But until then it is clear from the text that it is to be kept up. And I have a little dispute with some of you here present. You love the Lord, but you have never been baptized; you love Jesus, but you have never come to his table. Now let me say you are in opposition to Christ. He says, "Do this till I come", you don't do it. "Oh! but I am only one," say you. To your measure of ability you have helped to make the lord's Supper obsolete. Can you see that? If you have a right to neglect it, so have I—if I, so have all my brethren. Then there is an end to it. My dear brother, you are doing the best you can to make Christ forgotten in the world. I pray you by his own dying example and his express command, "This do ye in remembrance of me"—if ye have believed him, keep this, his commandment. If ye have not believed in him, then far hence! Ye have no right to take it.

But if you have believed, I beseech you stand not back for shame or fear, but eat and drink at his table till he come.

Time has gone too fast for me, and I must close. There is one lesson, however, that I cannot leave out. Until Christ come. We are taught our interim employment—what is to occupy us until Jesus comes. Beloved brethren, until Jesus comes we have nothing left but to think of him. Till Jesus comes the main thing we have to do is to think of and set him forth a crucified Saviour. There is no food for the Church but Jesus; there is no testimony to the world but Jesus crucified. They have sometimes told us that in this growing age we may expect to have developed a higher form of Christianity. Well, they shall have it that like it; but Christ himself has left us nothing but just this, "Show my death till I come." The preacher is to go on preaching a dying Saviour; the saint is to go on trusting that dying Saviour, feeding on him and letting his soul be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. There is nothing left us to occupy our thoughts, or to be the subject of our joy, as our dear dying Lord. Oh! let us feed on him. Each one, personally, as a believer—let him feed on his Saviour. If he has come once, come again. Keep on coming till Christ himself shall appear. As long as the invitation stands let us not slight it, but constantly come to Christ himself and feed on him.

In conclusion, let every ungodly person here know that he has no part nor lot in this matter. Thy first business, sinner, is with Christ himself. Go thou and put thy trust in him. Oh! go this night. Thou mayest never have another night to go in. And then when thou best believed, then obey his command in baptism, and then also come to his table and show his death until he come. The Lord bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.