

# “More than Meets the Eye”

Matthew 26:17-30

“This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?” That is what many of Jesus followers said back in John 6 when Jesus had said, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” This is a hard saying.

Jesus says to His disciples, in the Upper Room, “Take, eat; this is My body.” This is a hard saying. “Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant.” This is a hard saying.

Back in John 6, upon hearing those “hard words” many turned away and stopped following Jesus. Jesus asked the disciples, “Do you want to go away as well?” And Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Jesus says, “This is My body . . . This is My blood.” This is a hard saying, if we are relying on our mind, on our great rational mind, to bring us understanding. What we need to remember is that God has always presented Himself in the way He wanted to present Himself. The burning bush was God. He was in the burning bush. He was really there. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire at night in the Israelite camp was God. He was in the cloud, in the fire. He was really there.

And we need to remember that God has rescued His people in the way He wanted to rescue His people. The blood of the Lamb was to be painted on the doorposts and the lintel of the home, and if you didn't, the firstborn would die. You can't say, "That's not the kind of God I want." If you are searching for the true God, you don't get to shop around until you find one that suits your style. There is only One.

And this One, True God has said, "This is My body; this is My blood; given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. I have come to fix the problem of death, and this is how I am going to do it." But these are hard words. Then again, fixing sin and death; separating us from sin and death for all eternity is not easy.

Do you really think that this could be done in a simple way – free from pain; free from suffering; free from blood? You are saved by the shedding of blood. The wages of sin is death. The only way for God to fix the problem of death for you is for something (or someone) other than you to die in your place. The problem of death cannot be fixed without death. This is a hard saying.

The Covenant with Moses and the people was put into effect with the shedding of the blood of animals. And the blood was put in bowls and half of the blood was thrown against the altar, and half of the blood Moses took and threw it on the people using the stalk of the hyssop plant. As I said, "God has always presented Himself in the way He wanted to present Himself, and God has rescued His people in the way He wanted to rescue His people."

It was not the blood of animals thrown on the people that ultimately saved the Israelites in the days of Moses, but that was the way in which God chose for the people to participate in the blood that saves them. If throwing the blood of animals on the people would save you today, many of you might be thinking that you are glad you are watching this online, but you would be wrong.

If that blood meant life and salvation for you, you want to be washed in that blood.

Instead, God has chosen a different way for you to participate in the blood that saves you. The blood of animals was a foreshadowing of a greater reality. The blood of Christ is the greater reality. And like the burning bush, and like the pillar of cloud and fire, God is in the bread and wine.

Jesus gives His disciples His broken body and shed blood for the forgiveness of sins, and they eat it. He says, "This is My body . . . This is My blood" and none of the 12 question it or ask if He means really or just metaphorically or symbolically. Then the churches that these same men establish all teach that Christ is truly present under that form of bread and wine – that you take God into your mouth.

O, how we long for the day when we can gather once again at the Lord's Table and partake of the Sacrament – to eat this bread and drink this cup and proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, as St. Paul says. It is a mystery confessed to us by the Word of God; it is a mystery that is to be believed. Don't trust your mind to figure this one out. Just remember that God has always presented Himself in the way He wanted to present Himself, and God has rescued His people in the way He wanted to rescue His people. We don't want to be like the Israelites and question God and grumble about how He is rescuing us.

What does make sense is that, since sin and death entered the world by the first Adam eating food from a tree, God saving us by eating the food (the broken body) of Christ from the tree of the cross would be a logical fix to the problem of death brought on by Adam.

Does that explain it? Not in a way that will satisfy your skeptical friends. But it does confess it and shows the continuity of the Word of God from Old

Testament to New Testament to life in the church today. The purpose of studying the Word of God is not for the sake of knowledge, but faith.

He has said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” O, how I long to say those words standing at the altar. But remember that partaking of the Sacrament is not a work we must do in order to receive God’s grace, but this is the vehicle, the means, by which God’s grace comes to you. Again, this is how God has chosen to present Himself; this is how God has chosen to save you.

This is God participating with you. This is God in action, in your life, in the here and now. The body of Christ for you to eat. Christ brings His body to you, so that you can participate in the body of the Son of God. This is life in the church. And what a blessed life it is.

Your salvation is not based on your knowledge or some level of good works and the sanctified life you must achieve – now, that would be a hard saying. I am much more content with the assurance of the forgiveness of sins through no work of my own. I rejoice that this forgiveness is real and complete. But that forgiveness did come at a great cost. The problem of death cannot be fixed without death.

A body was broken. Blood was shed. In these strange times, I am heartened by the hunger and thirst for the Sacrament displayed by the people of Our Redeemer. Very soon you will be here, I will there at the altar, and the words of Jesus will be spoken, “This is My body; This is My blood. Take, eat; Drink of it all of you . . . for the forgiveness of sins.” We truly see even more now (as it has been taken away from us) what a cherished gift is the body and blood of the Lord. Amen.