

Communion sermon: The excellency of Christ

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Communion season

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Bible Text: Song of Solomon 2:1,2
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We read the word of God in 1 Corinthians 11:23,

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Amen.

You see in that passage of Scripture that it mentions eating and drinking unworthily and at this point the word of God gives some indication of who should and who should not take the Lord's Supper for there is an eating and drinking worthily which results in profit from the ordinance and there is an eating and drinking unworthily which results in guilt from the ordinance.

In our text earlier on, Christ, the bridegroom, speaks of the bride saying,

2 As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

The Lord's Supper is for the Lord's people and the Lord's people are a people whose hearts have been changed and who have begun to be different from the world. They are a lily among thorns. They are different, not as different as they ought to be and will be but they are different.

You say, "Well, I don't feel very different," but the question is this: has the pride been broken? Has the pride been broken so that you no longer think highly of yourself as if you didn't need Christ and his salvation? That really is the question, has the pride been broken so that you no longer think highly of yourself as if in need of nothing and in no need of Christ and salvation? Have you begun to think highly of Christ because you see in him all your hope and all your salvation?

Self-righteous sinners must stay away from the Lord's Table. You cannot possibly eat and drink worthily because you think you are worthy and so you cannot drink as poor pardoned sinners depending upon the Savior. That is impossible for you because your pride remains untouched and you see no need of Christ and his salvation. You are not included in the lily among thorns. Your portion is in this world and with this world and not in Christ. But believers, believers even weak and troubled and doubting believers who know that their only hope is in Christ, they must come to the Lord's Table. They must come because they must be strengthened and this supper is for the strengthening of the faith of the people of God, even the weakest and most feeble and trembling believer. This table is appointed for the strengthening of his people by him who saith, "I am the Rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley," and who says to his people, "In me is that help found." Amen.

Let us further sing to the Lord's praise the Psalm 22. Psalm 22:13-20.

13 Their mouth they open wide upon me, upon me gapeth they like to a lion ravening and roaring for his place. 14 Like water I am poured out, my bones all out of joint, amidst my bowels as the wax so melted is my heart.

Here the Rose of Sharon himself is showing his love for his bride, his suffering, suffering for sinners in order to save his people from their sins. The suffering of God's people are but a little and they compared with this, they are but the [unintelligible] of his sufferings. His sufferings were unique, unparalleled in this world as he bore the full wages of sin for his people.

During the singing of this Psalm before we take communion, we move into this central part of the church.

The verses which follow our text this morning are from the Song of Solomon 2:3 we read,

3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. 4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his

banner over me was love. 5 Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples:
for I am sick of love. 6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand
doth embrace me.

You'll see, first of all, from these verses, especially verse 3, that the bride as a lily among thorns is not looking at the thorns but at the bridegroom. He is set as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters, but her response is not to look at the thorns but rather she says, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons." And we must look to him among the sons, that is, compared with all else he is unique. There is none like him and she is looking at him, not at her troubles because she is sustained by him and made more like him by looking to him and that is what we must do also, and again there is such blessedness in Christ.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." There is shelter, there is refreshment, there is sustenance, there is the shade of the apple tree and there is the fruit of the apple tree showing that there is refreshment and shelter and sustenance and all blessedness in Christ.

Then he says, then we see her enjoying Christ and longing after him. Christ brings his people into the enjoyment of himself. "He brought me to the banqueting house, or the house of wine." Christians have been apprehended of Christ and he gives to them a feast of fat things and of wine [unintelligible]. Christ has declared his [unintelligible] concerning us. "His banner over me is love." He has declared his [unintelligible] concerning his people but he has loved them and he loves them and he will love them. He will never leave them. He will never forsake them. This banner of love over them is declaring that he will care for them in his love, he will defend them in his love, he will keep them in his love.

And we also learn that the discovery of Christ's love is fitted to overwhelm. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love." That "sick of love" means not that she is weary of it but that she is overwhelmed by it and ready to faint under the sense of it. She wants more of that love. "Stay me with flagons." But she also needs support in that love, so great is it, she says, "comfort me with apples," literally "straw me with apples." She wants to lie down in the apples because she cannot sustain, she cannot support herself under the sense of that love.

And the help is given. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." She is supported so as to experience his love.

You see, there is in Christ a love that passes knowledge. Generally we have but faint discoveries, faint apprehensions of the love of Christ, but some of God's people at certain times have had greater discoveries, greater awareness of the love of Christ than perhaps normal. But our greatest sense and apprehension of Christ's love toward us is never an exaggeration. It always falls short of the full apprehension of that love of Christ which there is and the people of God at times know something of that exquisite and awful

mixture of enjoyment of Christ and yet longing after it, longing after him for more, for the full apprehension of the love of Christ for his people is certainly fitted to overwhelm mere mortal men and women and we desire a fresh view, a fresh sense, a fresh apprehension of that love of Christ now that as we partake of his ordinance, his suffering in which he declares his love in the past and the present and future for his people, we desire that the Lord would cause us to know, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

We cannot ever fully understand the love of Christ which passes knowledge, it is such as will fill our attention forever and ever in the discovery of it in heaven, but even here on earth we desire a greater measure of understanding, of knowledge, of knowing the exceeding riches of his grace and kindness of his love toward us as poor sinners. That's what we desire as we take the Lord's Supper.

We remain seated as we give thanks for the bread and wine.

O Lord, our God, we come to thee confessing the poverty of our apprehension of the love of Christ. O Lord, that our grasp of it is so faint and fleeting, so fluctuating, so poor, so feeble. O Lord our God, we pray that as we partake of the bread and wine in accordance with our Savior's greatest appointment, enable us to see the King in his brilliance, enable us to see the loveliness of him who loved his own while he was in this world and loved them to the end, that we might see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who though he was rich yet for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be made rich. We pray that we might see something of the greatness of his sufferings and of the immensity of that love which caused him thus to suffer when he gave his life a ransom for men and lay down his life for his friends. Grant that we might see him as the Rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley and be made more like him. So we thank thee for this ordinance, for this bread and wine. Bless this ordinance to our souls for as the bread and wine [unintelligible] so that the truth set forth in it might nourish our souls in the knowledge of Christ and his redeeming love and we ask it for his sake. Amen.