

# The Focus of Scripture

People who read my articles know that I constantly keep on about the vital truth that we must keep focusing all our attention on Christ. Whether it is Bible study, church experience, personal righteousness or relationships, Christ must be at the centre of all we do. He is the goal and the one we follow. One example of an exhortation on this can be seen in the paper, *Everything Focused On Christ*.

## The context of the Lord's Supper

In this paper I want to do a simple overview to illustrate a particular truth. The issue is the argument about the Lord's Supper that concerns whether the bread and wine are part of a communal meal, or are something separate. For more information on this debate see, *The Lord's Supper: Part of a meal or after a meal?*

One of the key arguments put forward by those who champion that the supper is a meal, that the elements are taken within a social framework along with other food, is that the Supper is not a memorial but a reminder. The focus of the Supper (according to this erroneous view) is not the atonement but the final banquet in heaven at the Last Day, and in the Supper saints are reminding the Lord of his promise to return. Since the Supper is a full meal, it is a pointer to the wedding feast celebration of the Lamb, the heavenly party when all is finished in this world. To support this idea, strained exegesis is put forth based upon technical, and largely unsupported, analysis of Greek words, such as *deipnon* (supper) and particularly *anamnesis* (remembrance).

This view is at odds with the best evangelical and Reformed scholarship throughout church history, and is even disputed at a technical level by theologians and linguists. While there is a suggestion of the future wedding feast present in the Supper as a secondary feature (Matt 26:29), the central feature is a reminder of the cross. However, the chief argument against it is easily demonstrated by a simple look at scripture.

The controlling passage on this subject is 1 Corinthians 11 because it was written early on and it represents the final words of Christ spoken to his apostle from heaven under the guidance of the Spirit. It is a didactic section giving clear teaching and this has more weight than historical narratives elsewhere. It says this:

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."

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the intention of Paul is to cast the minds of the disciples back to the cross and not forward to the last day. The context screams of this; but the words, 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He

comes', seals the intention forever. [Proclaim does not mean remind! *Kataggello* means to declare, preach, announce, promulgate, make known, proclaim, publish, portray.]

### **The context of scripture and heaven**

Now this emphasis of Paul should not surprise us because the focus of scripture is Christ, and particularly his sacrifice on the cross. It is, and always will be, the centre of heaven's worship – the amazement that God should come in human form to Earth and die for a rebellious created people.

And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.' Rev 5:9

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honour and glory and blessing!' Rev 5:11-12

### **The present purpose**

To emphasise this point I want to give a very cursory survey of things that God commanded his people to concentrate upon as a remembrance. The most important features always signify the atonement of Christ.

## **Milestones celebrated by God's people**

### **The need to remember**

Remembering God's powerful deeds on our behalf is a constant theme of scripture:

I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all your work, and talk of your deeds. Ps 77:11-12

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your works; I muse on the work of your hands. Ps 143:5

Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me. Isa 46:9

### **The flood**

The global flood was the judgment of God upon sin in the world and the salvation of only eight people out of many millions. This is repeatedly mentioned as a reminder and exhortation to obedience through scripture, right up to the apostle Peter (2 Pt 2:5).

The flood is a powerful picture of salvation in Christ, which even mentions the word for 'atonement'. The ark (a type of Christ) contains the elect (in Christ, in the ark) who are saved from the wrath of God against sinners. The pitch that saved them by keeping out the water, keeping out God's judgment, is the same basic Hebrew word as 'atonement'. This symbol, which God's people were continually reminded of, is a picture of Christ's work in redemption.

### **The Exodus**

Throughout Israel's history the Exodus stands tall amongst those things which God expects his people to remember. Psalm after psalm refers to the Exodus in proving the faithfulness of God to Israel, urging saints to ponder it often as stimulation to service. [Ps 66:5-6, 77:11-20, 78:11ff, 53, 106:8-9, 136:13-16]

Now the Exodus is the remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt and is a powerful type of the Lord's deliverance from sin on the cross. In typical form, the Israelites were to constantly remember the work of Christ in deliverance.

### **The brazen serpent**

This is not a repeated ritual but a once only event in Israel's' history. The story can be found in Numbers 21:8-9. This is a clear picture of the death of Christ raised up on a cross, which the Lord himself referred to (Jn 3:14).

### **The waters of Marah (Ex 15:23-25)**

In this incident we see the bitter waters of Marah made sweet after Moses threw a tree into them. Jesus was thrown into the bitter waters of death that we should be made sweet unto God. Bitterness is taken away from the elect by Christ who was crucified upon a 'tree'.

### **The smitten rock**

This rock, after being struck by Moses, becomes a supply of life-giving water. Springs flow from that which was dead. The rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:4).

### **The Red Heifer (Num 19)**

Every aspect of sin is dealt with through the many types of the cross. Here is the solution to any contact with death. Christ's cross covers every eventuality of sin and frees us from death; the value of his blood is always available to secure our cleansing.

### **The entrance into Canaan**

The crossing of the Jordan under the leadership of Joshua is another great milestone in the history of Israel which is constantly held up for remembrance. This symbolises coming into the land of inheritance, picturing the fulness of eternal life and God's promises. Israel's captain that led them has the same name of Christ (Joshua = Jesus). He was able to lead them into the Promised Land as a result of the previous deliverance from the world (Exodus) and the weeding out of unbelievers in the wilderness.

This is yet another type of the work of Christ; entering salvation is only achieved after the work of deliverance. Again the cross is at the forefront of the memorial.

### **Interim conclusion**

These types reveal that we must keep reminding ourselves of the work of Christ in salvation; we must look back and remember what God did for us in sending the Son to die for our sins.

## **Rituals celebrated by God's people**

There are so many items to consider here that it would take a book to cover them all. I will mention a select few briefly.

### **Patriarchal sacrifices**

From the beginning God had commanded Adam to sacrifice an animal substitute to remind him of the need for cleansing from sin by blood to effect the restoration of his walk with God. Thus we see the patriarchs setting up altars to offer up sheep and goats, which is as important to them as building wells to get water. Both these items symbolise the work of Christ on the cross; the sacrificial offerings picture atonement and the wells symbolise the application of this by the Spirit to bring life.

### **The offerings system**

As soon as the Israelites are free from the Egyptians they are taught the commandments by God which they are to follow, and how to set up the worship system based upon the Tabernacle. The central focus of the Tabernacle was the offerings, animal sacrifices, to cover every eventuality of disruption to fellowship with God. All of these symbolise different aspects of the work of Christ in redemption.

Every day there would have been the smell of burning animal flesh in the camp and the smoke of yet another sacrifice. Here was a constant reminder of the work of Christ on the cross. Nothing in the worship system was done without the shedding of blood.

### **The daily offerings**

To emphasise the focus upon a sacrifice (as if there were not enough in the day) there was a morning and an evening sacrifice of a lamb without blemish (Ex 29:38-39).

### **The grain offering and the drink offering**

These were offered up with animal sacrifices and particularly along with the morning and evening sacrifice (Ex 29:41).

The grain offering was made of fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense, which was burned on the altar. This symbolises the righteous, crushed life of Christ given up in death (Lev 2:1ff). [Righteousness is signified by the lack of leaven and the beating small to produce no unevenness.]

The drink offering (Lev 23:13) was wine that was poured out at the altar to God, just as Jesus' life was poured out to God for sin (Ps 22:14).

### **The anointing oil and incense**

The oil of anointing was made to a strict recipe by a specialist (Ex 30:23ff) and copying it was forbidden on pain of death. Once made it was holy and it was used to anoint the Tabernacle, the vessels and the priests to separate them for God. This symbolically gave them a sweet smell before the Lord rather than their natural sin.

The incense used in the Tabernacle was added to the sacrifices. Various spices were crushed and beaten to form a fine powder that was then burned (Ex 30:34-38). A censer filled with burning incense was the only thing (apart from blood) taken into the Holy of Holies by the High Priest once a year to make atonement (Lev 16).

These speak of the value of the fragrance of Jesus. In typical terms the Tabernacle system needed to have the fragrance of Christ rather than man, and these items speak of the value of Christ's life given up in death (beaten small).

### **Feasts**

There were three chief feasts that Jews were obliged to attend (Ex 23:14-19); these were Unleavened Bread in Spring, Pentecost in early Summer and Tabernacles in the Autumn. All these speak about the work and ministry of Christ in salvation. The most important was Unleavened Bread which contained the Passover feast, which introduces it, and First-fruits. This clearly emphasises the work of Christ in effecting deliverance from sin and the world through death followed by resurrection. Pentecost speaks about the outpouring of the Spirit upon the church to effect the value of what Christ procured in redemption. Only Tabernacles speaks about the end, in the context of the in-gathering, or fulness, of the work on the cross when the last elect person is saved.

### **The priesthood**

The priesthood established a permanent reminder of the need for a mediator between God and man. The priest represented the people to God and was necessary to effect all the rituals of the Tabernacle. Jesus is our great High Priest with the power of an endless life who both represented us to God but also presented his own body as a sacrifice on the cross.

### **The sense of looking forward in the Old Covenant**

To those who would appeal to evidence of a looking forward in Old Testament texts this is explained as looking forward to the cross. There is some evidence of looking forward to the resurrection (as in Abraham and Joseph) but such examples are far outweighed by the looking forward to the cross and the Messiah.

All the OT types and symbols were fulfilled in the cross of Christ and to OT saints this was a future event. The fulness of what the offerings signified was the cross; there was no spiritual value in these sacrifices on their own. The OT saint looked forward in faith to God's deliverance that was pictured by the ritual in view. Thus he sacrificed his lamb confident that it spoke of his faith in God's future provision of redemption.

Now while they looked forward in time to the cross, we look back in time to the cross, which is the pivotal point of history (which is why the apostles say that we are now in the Last Times). These rituals do not chiefly concentrate upon the wedding banquet at the end, but on the fulness achieved by Christ's work of salvation. They are looking forward to the same thing that we look upon in remembrance.

### **Interim conclusion**

Over and over again the rituals established by God's command were used to turn the attention of the Lord's people to the cross of Christ. Each type pictured another aspect of the fulness of atonement in the work of Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

The Lord's people are constantly exhorted to look to the cross. Even in heaven the living creatures, angels and elders (saints) focus upon the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Virtually all the types, symbols, rituals, services and milestones of the Old Testament set the attention of men upon the cross more than anything else.

The greatest moment in the history of the universe is when God deigned to humble himself as a man; to suffer, and die for humanity. This pivotal point in God's plan will always be the central feature of our attention.

The Lord's Supper, the central feature of the local church and the only repeated sacrament, is clearly stated by Paul to point to the cross and to remind Christians week-by-week of what this means. It establishes the meeting in reverence, worship and humility as we bow before the Lord who died for us. It is crucial that this service is conducted Biblically, righteously and decently.

The suggestion that the Supper does not refer to the past but to the future is an error; an error that is antagonistic to the whole thrust of scripture. The Bible focuses on Christ and particularly upon his atonement; it is the pivot of history as well as scripture. To claim that the local church does not focus upon this event in quietness and reverence is a serious mistake.

To make matters worse, the claim that the central focus of the church is the wedding feast at the end does much mischief. First (in the practice of those teaching this error) it sets the Lord's Supper in the midst of a communal meal, claiming that the whole meal is the Supper. Thus the bread and wine are taken amidst the revelry of social interchange with people chatting, sewing, playing and so on. This is close to blasphemy. This indecency is tolerated by them since their typology of the Supper is not the cross but a banquet. While social fellowship is encouraged by this relaxed attitude, the Biblical focus is utterly lost, creating disorder and irreverence.

Make no mistake, God draws our attention to the cross, and in the local church this is chiefly demonstrated in the reverent celebration of the Supper away from any communal meal, and conducted in quietness, worship and submission.

[See associated paper, *Does God ask to be reminded.*]

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