

Coming to God

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, a symbol of unity among believers, and the vital role of prayer in the church's life.

Scripture: Luke 22:19

Topics: "The Power of Prayer", "The Lord's Supper"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Supper as a solemn act of remembrance instituted by Jesus on the night of His betrayal. He explains that this ordinance serves as a time for worship, a public witness to the unity of believers, and a reminder of Christ's return. MacDonald also discusses the importance of frequency in observing the Lord's Supper, advocating for regular participation while highlighting the need for self-examination among believers. He concludes by stressing the necessity of prayer in the church, outlining conditions for effective prayer and the importance of sincerity and specificity in requests.

Transcript

THE LORD'S SUPPER

This solemn act of remembrance was instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal.' Immediately after He had celebrated the last Passover with His disciples, He introduced what we know as the Lord's supper. "He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.' Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you' ", (Luke 22:19, 20).

1. Why Keep the Feast?

With regard to the significance of this ordinance, certain facts are presented. First, it is an occasion for remembrance. The Savior said, "This do in remembrance of Me." It is a time to remember His sufferings and death, the giving of His body, the shedding of His blood. Here Calvary with all its sacred associations passes before the minds of the participants. It is quite impossible thus to remember the passion of the Lord Jesus without responding to God with worship and praise. Thus the Lord's supper is a time of public worship, a time of adoring God for all He is and all He has done.

Then again, the Lord's supper is a public witness to the unity of the body of Christ. The loaf of bread is a picture of the body of Christ, made up of all true believers. In partaking of the bread, the believer testifies that he is one with every true child of God. In drinking of the cup, he acknowledges that he is one with everyone who has been cleansed by the precious blood (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17).

Finally, the Lord's supper is a constant reminder that the One who instituted this memorial of Himself is coming again. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus, the worshipper not only looks back to Golgotha and remembers Him in His death, he not only looks upward to the Throne of God and praises Him for an accomplished redemption, but he also looks forward to that moment when the Lord will descend from heaven and take His waiting people home.

2. As Oft As Ye Do

With regard to the time and frequency of the Lord's supper, the Scriptures do not command in the language of law, but entreat with the voice of grace. In Acts 20:7, it is stated that "upon the first day of the week, . . . the disciples came together to break bread., The first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Sunday. It is the day of the Lord's resurrection and a fitting day for His people to meet together for worship and remembrance. The instruction is, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The moment a person says it must be observed every week, or month, or quarter, he has gone beyond what the Bible says. At the same time, the probability is very strong that the early disciples met every week to remember the Lord.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon argued strongly for a weekly observance of the Lord's supper. "My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God's people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord's Table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance-it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on the Lord's day, whatever the subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth the death of Christ till He come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating His supper will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons."

Jonathan Edwards also was an advocate of a weekly remembrance of the Lord. "It seems plain by the Scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord's Day, and so I believe it will be again in the church of Christ in days that are approaching.

3. Eligibility

It should scarcely need to be mentioned that the Lord's supper is only for Christians. Only those who have been redeemed are eligible and capable of entering into its sacred meaning. Christians themselves should partake of the emblems in a judged condition (1 Corinthians 11:28). Sin must be confessed and forsaken, and the emblems must be taken in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11: 21, 22). All who partake without judging themselves are in danger of being chastened by the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29-32).

Here again it is good to remind ourselves that it is possible to eat the bread and drink the wine without really remembering the Lord. It is possible to reduce this ordinance to a mere ritual if our heart does not answer to what we are doing in symbol. Our lives must be in fellowship with God if we are truly to obey His words, "Remember me."

PRAYER

Not very much information is given in the New Testament concerning the meetings of the local church. we do know that the Christians assembled for fellowship, prayer, ministry of the Word, and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42); but beyond that there seems to be a veil. As far as gospel testimony is concerned, that appears to have been carried on by the individual Christian outside the confines of the assembly, wherever the unsaved could be reached, but always with the idea of bringing the ones who were saved into the fellowship of a local church.

In all the gatherings of the early assemblies, certainly nothing was more prominent than prayer. In fact, the church was born in the wake of prayer (Acts 1:14), and thereafter the Christians "continued steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 2:42). The Book of Acts presents numerous instances of prayer, at all times and in all places. Indeed, the entire history of the church is a tribute to the faithfulness of God who answers prayer.

1. A Special Promise

We do well to remind ourselves constantly that collective prayer not only has divine sanction, but carries with it a special promise of the presence of the Lord Himself. In Matthew 18:19 and 20, we read, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Language could scarcely be clearer than this. We have a twofold pledge that cannot be broken. First, when two believers are united in presenting a petition to God, that request is answered. Secondly, when Christians are gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, He is there in their midst. The trouble is that we do not believe it. If we did, our prayer meetings would be filled, and our churches would be on fire for God.

2. How to Pray as a Group

In considering the subject of collective prayer, we should like at the outset to present a few elementary facts concerning it. First of all, in a prayer meeting, one person leads at a time. The others are silent, but actually all are praying. The one whose voice is audible is expressing the prayers of the group. The others follow him as he prays, and makes his prayer their own. Oftentimes they express this unity of spirit by saying "Amen." Next, we want to mention that there is a big difference between "saying prayers" and praying. There is a children's hymn which makes this distinction:

I often say my prayers ; But do I ever pray?

And do the wishes of my heart ; Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down; And worship gods of stone

As offer to the living God; A prayer of words alone.

For words without the heart; The Lord will never hear;

Nor will He to those lips attend; Whose prayers are not sincere.

There is nothing that will kill a prayer meeting more quickly than a series of rehearsed prayers where there is no real heart interest. Too often we just go through a list of empty petitions. The prayers of young converts are usually refreshing because they are spontaneous and fresh. But older Christians frequently fall into a pattern of prayer that is useless for God or man. It has been well said, "Meetings where prayers are offered from a sense of duty only, need closing down."

Another danger that should be avoided is long prayers. It is true that Scripture says "Pray without ceasing," but this does not authorize an individual to monopolize the time in the prayer meeting. If the prayers are short and many men take part, the interest will be increased.

Then, too, our requests should be specific. Do not pray, "God, save many souls throughout the world." Better pray, "Lord, save my brother, David." Then when David is saved, you will know your prayer has been answered and you will be encouraged to pray for others by name.

3. Be Specific

There is no reason why any prayer meeting should be a dull affair. There are plenty of specific requests which we can bring to the Throne of Grace. Here are a few of them.

Pray for those who are in authority over us, mentioning them by name. Pray that they might be saved, and that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2).

Pray for those who are sick in your church. The Lord knows who they are, but maybe some of the Christians don't, so give their names.

Pray for unsaved relatives and friends. We should never be ashamed to have our loved ones mentioned in the prayer meeting. If we really want them to be saved, we will welcome the prayer support of the church.

Pray for the elders in the church. They have important responsibilities which require wisdom and patience. They deserve an interest in your supplications.

Pray for missionaries who have gone out from your local church. If you correspond with them from time to time, you will know what problems they are facing and what their needs might be.

Pray for the Sunday School, for its superintendent, for the teachers, and for the boys and girls who are being taught the Word of God.

Pray for the poor. If it would cause embarrassment to anyone present, it might be better to withhold names in this instance.

Pray for the men and women from your assembly in the armed forces. They face dangers, temptations and trials. They need your prayers.

Pray for those who are engaged in the work of the Lord, such as evangelists and teachers.

Then in your prayers be sure to include thanksgiving. This is forcefully brought before us in Philippians 4:6. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

The Lord rightfully expects His people to be thankful. Ingratitude for all His mercies is sin.

4. Important Conditions

But are there not conditions that must be observed if our prayers are to be answered? Indeed there are!

First, we must abide in Christ. He said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you,, (John 15:7). Abiding in Christ is keeping His commandments, doing His will, obeying His Word.

Secondly, our prayers should be according to His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Since the general outline of God's will is found in the Bible, our requests should be scriptural.

Third, our requests should be offered in the Name of Christ. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). When we truly ask in His Name, it is the same as if He were making the request to God.

Finally, our motives must be pure. James reminds us that we ask and receive not because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts (James 4:3). If our motives are selfish and sinful, we cannot expect an answer.

5. A Few Rules to Remember

There are a few more do's and don't's which should be mentioned if our prayer meetings are going to be "the power-house of the church." For instance, do not pray to be seen. The hypocrites, you remember, love to stand praying in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men (Matthew 6:5). Again, do not ask God to do something you can do yourself. We ask God to bring the unsaved into our Gospel meetings. Does He not expect us to use our lips to invite them and our cars to bring them? And be careful that you do not ask for something you know you should not have. God sometimes grants such requests but sends leanness to the soul (Psalm 106:15). Do not be discouraged if the answer does not come immediately. God's answers are never too early lest we miss the blessedness of waiting upon Him; they are never too late lest we fear we have trusted Him in vain. Then, if God's answer is not just exactly what you asked for, remember this! The Lord reserves the right to give us something better than we ask for. We do not know what is best for us, but He does, and so He gives us more than we could ever ask or think.

Finally let us emphasize that there can be no real progress in the church without prayer. We can go through a routine, and produce even seeming results, but nothing is accomplished for God apart from intercession. If we do not see this conclusion from the Scriptures, we will be soon driven to it by sheer necessity.

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