

His Mercy and His Means

II. What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?

With swords and clubs you have come out to capture me, our Lord Jesus said to those who came to seize Him, as against a thief? And it does seem somewhat absurd to us, does it not, that they would come at Him like that, obviously absolutely unnecessary. We think of our Lord Jesus as a peaceful person, a teacher of peace, even the Prince of Peace, as it was predicted of Him by His Prophet that His name was to be called, along with wonderful Counselor and other pleasant things.

But then, they did have His disciples to deal with, also; and they were ready, as we hear it, to *strike with the sword*. He Himself, though, offered no resistance, and even *forbade* His disciples to strike with the sword. *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given to me?* In this night the Son of Man would willingly give Himself over into the hands of sinners, according to the eternal will of God, which is His own eternal will. But of course, those who came against Him as against a thief, well, they did not know that, did they?

What He Himself pointed out about the absurdity of coming against Him as against a thief was this: *that day after day I sat in the Temple teaching, and you did not seize me*. By coming for Him in secret, they gave themselves away, or rather, they gave their masters away, as they themselves were only acting under orders, but that is beside the point, for the point is that what cannot be done but under the cover of darkness will usually be the *works of darkness* and not only the works of cowards, backstabbing and betrayal. *He that whispers, lies, we say where I come from, although that is not necessarily true, for there can be very legitimate reasons for not being loud; in fact, most often, not being loud is just common courtesy. That, though, also, is beside the point.*

More importantly, as our Lord Jesus also pointed out, for them to come out against Him as against a thief *had to take place that the Scriptures of the Prophets might be fulfilled*. For He had had His Prophet Isaiah write it, that *He was numbered among transgressors*. A thief He was definitely not; He had never taken anything for Himself that was not His own; well, in a way He had, and we shall get back to that, but not in the way that a thief would. But then, the term *thief* was used for all kinds of criminal in those days, such as the criminals who were to be crucified alongside Him.

See, they must have been found guilty of rebellion against the Roman Empire, as our Lord Jesus Himself would be, to be crucified; the agony of crucifixion was one Roman law reserved for rebels, and for slaves, not one to which common thieves would be exposed.

Our Lord Jesus was indeed to be numbered among transgressors; He was to be crucified with criminals. In fact, before the judgement of God, He was to be counted as the *only* transgressor and counted as *all* transgressors, also, crucified and cursed and condemned for the sin of all sinners.

For this the Son of God had had Himself made to become the Son of Man, born into our kind, and made to *be* our kind, to pay the price and penalty for the sin of all Mankind, on our behalf, for the salvation of all Mankind.

He is Himself the Holy One of God, and God Himself from eternity. He is the one who had spoken to Moses out of a burning bush and commanded Him to go deliver His people from slavery in Egypt; and when Moses had asked Him: *When I come to the children of Israel and say to them: 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me: 'What is His name?', what shall I say to them?'* He had answered him: *I am who I am!*, and: *Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'I Am has sent me to you.'*

And so, when He asked those who came to capture Him for whom they had come, and they said to Him: *Jesus of Nazareth*, and He answered them: *I am He!*, it was God Himself who spoke to them the divine name in which is all the power of the very being of God; and therefore is it that, as we heard it, when He said to them: *I am He*, they drew back and fell to the ground.

And therefore is it, also, that He then said to them: *If it is I that you seek, let these go!* He whose name is *I am* had come to give Himself over to suffer and die and be judged to deliver those who belong to Him from suffering and death and judgement. For this He had had Himself baptised with us winners, baptised *into* us and all that is ours, to take our sin upon Himself, and make it His own, who is Himself without sin, and make Himself one, not only with sinners, but also with our sin itself, as utterly and entirely abominable sin is to Him. And in this night the Son of God, who had had Himself made to become the Son of Man, would also have Himself given over into the hands of sinners, as we heard it earlier tonight that He said it that He would. He would submit Himself to the evil of His enemies, their ungodliness and unbelief, and endure it; and ultimately He would endure even the judgement of God against it.

And the judgement of God which He would endure is *His* own judgement. For He is not only Himself God, but also the one God has appointed from eternity to be the Judge of the living and the dead. And so, what He would suffer was His own judgement, His own righteous wrath against ungodliness and unbelief, the hatred of His holy goodness against evil and impurity.

For this would He give Himself up to be crucified. Clothed in the sin of all sinners He would have Himself hung up high toward Heaven, presented to God for His judgement, and judged and damned for it and with it, as it was written of Him: *Cursed is He who is hanged upon a tree!*, so that the sin of all Mankind might be judged and damned in Him, and die, and be done away with and be no more.

This was the cup the Father had given to Him to drink, which He had willingly taken from the Father's hand, as He had taken it upon Himself to do from eternity, for love of the Father, and for love of sinners, for those who had not only failed His love, but would also inflict upon Him the most severe sufferings of all. So good is God. And in the sufferings of the Son for the salvation of sinners God would glorify His own goodness, and glorify the Son, and the Son would glorify the Father and make His goodness manifest. As He has had His Apostle write it of Him: *Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the name that is above all names.* And as it had been written of Him already ages ago in the Scriptures of the Prophets, and was to be fulfilled in this night in which the Son of Man was given over into the hands of sinners: *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong: because He poured out His soul unto death and was numbered with transgressors.*

In His sufferings and death for the salvation of sinners He has both glorified the goodness of God and fulfilled the Father's will. Therefore has He who was hung up high in shame been exalted to the highest heavenly glory of all. The greatest portion of all has been given to Him, which, to Him, is the salvation of sinners, that is: *your* salvation, yes. And He divides the spoil with the strong, that is: His most mighty angels share in His joy over the salvation of all who belong to Him, His Church and His Christians, and you.

And He divides the spoil, not only with His mighty angels, but also with us who are weak, us sinners who are His Church and His Christians, and His precious portion, as He has us join Him in His own joy over our salvation, and distributes His salvation itself to us.

In His festive meal of salvation, He gives to us to eat bread which, by His Word, really and actually is His body, that which was given up to be crucified for our salvation; He pours out for us to drink wine which really and actually is His blood, poured out for us as He poured out His soul to death for our salvation. And so He makes us one with Himself in His glory, as He had Himself made one with us in our sin and shame by having Himself baptised into us. As He had Himself baptised into us to take upon Himself us and all that is ours to bear it for us, and His own judgement against it, He gives Himself to us, with all that He is and all that is His. As He said it on the night in which He was betrayed, or *given over* - those are the same word in Greek - *this is my body and this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*

And what this means is nothing less than that with the bread and wine given to you in His festive meal of salvation, He gives Himself to you, and all that is His, His righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, and His Kingdom, and His heavenly life.

As our Catechism says it, *these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words.* Yes, for when that is given to us, with which forgiveness of sins has been won for us, fully and completely, and life and salvation, well, then forgiveness of sins and life and salvation cannot but be given to us with it and in it. For, as our Catechism says it, *where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.* When the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, declares us to be right with Himself, so that we are that, because the heavenly Judge Himself says so, well, then all judgement is dealt with and done away with, and nothing prevents His love from being upon us in all its fullness. And when His love is upon us, and we are under His love, our heavenly life has already begun, even before we shall see Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory, and rejoice in His goodness and His glorious presence, always.

And so the Sacrament is so much more than merely a memorial for our Saviour, and our salvation; it is even more than His own *assurance* of our salvation, although it is that, also; the Sacrament is His salvation itself, the new covenant in His blood. In it He gives Himself to us, who is Himself God, and all that is His, His salvation, His heavenly glory and His eternal life.

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! *Amen.*