

## His Mercy and His Means

### III. How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

The high priest asked Him, as we heard it: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed?* And our Lord Jesus said: *I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven.* So He said it, and so we believe it, that He is ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Now, although our Lord Jesus had spoken openly to the world and taught both in synagogues and in the Temple, where all Jews would come together, not many had quite comprehended what He had taught. Some said, as we heard it, that they had heard Him say: *I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.* Well, He had said something somewhat similar, but not quite what they quoted Him as having said; what He had said was that if others were to destroy *this Temple*, as He knew that others would, *I will raise it up in three days.* Now, this was a different thing to say, and ever so much more as *He was*, as the holy Apostle John informs us, *speaking of the Temple that is His body.* Now, this mystery is profound as it is, and it must have appeared even more profound before it had all come to pass.

So it is no wonder that those who did not know the wonder could not quite comprehend what it was that our Lord Jesus had said; the high priest, though, although he had not himself heard what our Lord Jesus had said about the Temple, had an idea as to what He *might* have said. And it seems that he was not too far off in what he thought our Lord Jesus had *probably* said. And it seems that he understood, also, the implications, both of what he *thought* our Lord Jesus *might* have said, and of what He had actually said: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed?*

For through the confusion of the false witness given by false witnesses, that our Lord Jesus had said *something* about building the Temple, the high priest heard an echo of what God had spoken to David in days of old: *I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever. And: I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son.* And hearing this, the high priest had a sense who our Lord Jesus actually had claimed to be with whatever He might have said about the Temple being destroyed and raised.

He sensed that our Lord Jesus might have claimed to be the one of whom God had said that *I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son*. And so he asked our Lord Jesus: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed?* And our Lord Jesus said: *I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven*. So He said it, and so we believe it, that He is ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

And seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realm He has, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *been given as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body and His fullness, who fills all in all*. It is as such He lives and reigns in His Church, as Saviour; He gives Himself to His Christians, and the salvation that is in Him, with His Word of salvation, and with His body and blood, given to His Christians, for real, in bread and wine, in His festive meal of salvation.

Although they did not understand it, it was of this the false witnesses had heard Him speak, who spoke of what they had not actually heard, but only *thought* they had heard, when He said: *Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it up in three days!* For again, as His holy Apostle John says it, *He was speaking of the Temple that is His body*. His body was to be given over and be destroyed in death. Already, as we heard it, the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Him to put Him to death, and so, of course, they were going to find it, content as they were, even, with the confused babbling of false witnesses; those whose minds are made up already are usually not all that apt to care much about truth, are they? Ultimately, though, they themselves would not put Him to death, for under Roman law they did not have the right to, rather, they would hand Him over to the Roman governor under a convoluted claim that by claiming to be the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed, as He was, He was raising a rebellion against the Roman empire, which He was not. And so they would have Him killed the way Rome would kill those who rebelled against the empire, by crucifixion, and so it would be brought about, what our Lord Jesus would later have His holy Apostle Paul write, that *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree"*.

He had already had Himself made to be a curse to God, He who is Himself the Son of God, and God Himself from eternity, and the Holy One of God, Himself without any sin or shortcoming.

He had had Himself born into sinful Mankind, and baptised with sinners, to take our sin upon Himself, and bear it for us, in our stead and on our behalf, and His own judgement against it, the fullness of suffering, all the hatred of the holy goodness of God against evil and impurity, against ungodliness and unbelief, to have the demand of His own Law fulfilled upon Himself, and that of His own righteousness, that all evil be duly damned and destroyed, all impurity, all ungodliness, all unbelief, all the sin and shortcomings of sinners.

For this He had come, the Son of the Most Blessed, to be condemned and cursed; thus He would bring to completion what was the Father's will, and His own, the rescue God had resolved in His heart from eternity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, for His most beloved creatures.

*Therefore God has highly exalted Him, as the holy Apostle Paul also writes it, and bestowed upon Him the name that is above every name. And again, He has been given as Head over all things to the Church, which is His body and His fullness, who fills all in all. As such He lives and reigns in His Church, as Saviour, by giving Himself to His Christians, with His salvation, in the life of His Church.*

The high priest understood who our Lord Jesus claimed to be. Therefore he asked: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed?* And our Lord Jesus said: *I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven.* So He said it, and so we believe it, that He is ascended into Heaven and lives and reigns in His Church, with His salvation, and we believe that He shall come be to our Judge, who gave Himself up to fulfil His judgement upon Himself for our salvation, and now gives Himself to us, with His salvation, in His Word of salvation, and in His body and blood, once given and shed for our salvation.

He has given up His body to be destroyed, and in three days He has raised it up anew. And since He is God, the body in which He dwells is the true Temple of God. And since He lives in His Church, and gives Himself to her, she is His body, and His fullness, who fills all in all. So He said it, and so we believe it. This is what it means, what He had said: *Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it up in three days!*

The high priest saw at least some of the implications of what our Lord Jesus had said: *Are you the Christ, the Son of the Most Blessed?* But he did not see the salvation of God in what he saw, nor did the rest of the council; they saw only outrage, and they all condemned him as deserving death.

They will, though, as our Lord Jesus said it, *see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven*. But they shall not see Him coming with *salvation*, as shall His Christians, rather, as our Lord Jesus had said it: *The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the Word I have spoken will judge him on the last day*. His Word of salvation, and His salvation itself, shall be what condemns those who would not know of His salvation.

The salvation of God is given to sinners freely and for nothing, with His promise, out of His goodness alone, and for no other reason whatsoever. God is that good, so unbelievable good. Only ever so much more evil, then, is the ungodliness of not believing this the unbelievable goodness of God; and all the more severe must the judgement of His goodness be upon such evil.

Similarly, our Catechism says it that *in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us*; and again, this is all out of His goodness and mercy alone, and for no other reason.

But to take part in His festive meal of salvation outwardly only, in unbelief, not seeking in it the salvation He promises in it and with it, and gives, well, although His body is really given to you, and His blood, you will not receive salvation in it or with it; no more than to understand His claim to be the Christ is to have salvation in Him, when one rejects His claim, and His salvation, and Himself.

Exactly because His body and blood are given with His body and blood is it that, as the Apostle writes it, *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty with regards to the body and blood of the Lord*, and: *anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself*. As our Catechism also says it: *Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things*, that is: give to us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, *but the words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."* These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. *Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "Forgiveness of sins"*.

When you seek His salvation where He has told you to seek Him, His Word will work exactly what He has said it would, life and salvation, along with your bodily eating and drinking; for that is the faith: to seek His salvation where He has told you to seek His salvation, and promised that you will find it - with Him.

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