

SERMON: THE GREATEST GRACE, BY THE GREATEST PERSON, BEFORE THE GREATEST MEAL

MATTHEW 26: 26-28

(26) And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said Take, eat; this is my body. (27) And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying Drink ye all of it; (28) For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Introduction

We all are familiar with the grace before a meal. It is a prayer of thanksgiving delivered before we begin to eat. In the “old school” era, everyone in the family sitting around the dinner table had to recite a Bible verse, after which, the father would “say the grace.” Of course, our post-modern lifestyles make this extremely difficult. However, during the quarantine, some families have re-established this devotional practice. Let’s go back even further- several centuries. The prayer we now call grace is a shorter version of the phrase, “Now thank we all our God for this food provided by His bountiful grace.” Since the last word was grace, that became the title of the meal-time prayer. The actual prayer was included in a version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which is the official liturgical service book of Anglican churches. The term “grace” also dove-tails with the Latin word for thanksgiving which is *gratia*. In addition to giving thanks, they would also ask God to bless the food. Why would they ask God to bless the food? Before refrigeration and canning were invented, some of the food would become rancid and almost inedible before consumption. They had to eat it anyway because food was scarce. They did not know about bacteria, but they knew you were more likely to get sick from eating rancid food than from fresh food. They knew from past experience that even certain fresh foods would upset a particular person’s stomach; yet they had to eat it anyway, because there was no other food available. It was probably due to allergies. So their meal-time prayers would sometimes sound like this, “Lord, this is all the food I have and I thank you for it. Please don’t let it make me sick. Please let it nourish my fragile, weak body.” As we say grace before meals, if we think about the history of this ritual, it will become more than just a routine. It will become a grateful acknowledgement of our total dependence on God.

On the Thursday night of what we now call Passion Week, Jesus sat down with His disciples in the Upper Room of a nameless friend’s house. They celebrated the traditional Passover meal. This was a call to remembrance of that night when the death angel passed over every house in Egypt whose lintel and doorposts were sprinkled with the blood of a lamb without blemish. After the traditional meal had ended, Jesus took the leftovers and instituted the great Sacrament of all ages-Holy Communion. Jesus would become our Passover Lamb and would die once and for all for the sins of humankind. His blood would deliver us from a plight that was far worse than the slavery

of the Jews in Egypt. As I read this Scripture a few days ago, as I have done many times, a new thought popped into my head and took control of my heart. On this solemn occasion, Jesus found it possible to still be thankful to God, the Father. Amazing! This is an example for us. The greatest grace was given, by the greatest person of all times, before the greatest meal of all times.

Exposition

1. Jesus Gave Thanks Knowing Judas Would Betray Him

2. Jesus Gave Thanks Knowing Peter Would Deny Him

3. Jesus Gave Thanks Knowing the Crowd Would Choose Barabbas over Him

4. Jesus Gave Thanks Knowing He Would Suffer a Horrible, Humiliating Death

5. Jesus Gave Thanks Knowing He Would Rise Early On The Third Day

(That's The Good Part-This Is a Good Time to Shout)

Closing Thoughts

I am reminded of the traditional poetic grace that is often recited and sometimes sang to the hymn tune, *Hendon*:

“God is great and God is good;
Let us thank Him for this food.
By His Hands we all are fed,
Give us Lord our daily bread,
Give us Lord our daily bread.”

Communion is a memorial of the death of our Savior. It also reminds us that Jesus is the Bread of Life. In addition, the elements are symbols affirming that God supplies our daily bread and all of our needs according to His vast riches in glory.

Give God Glory! Give God All the Glory!

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