

## Rite of Passage, Part 2

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Good morning, everyone. Today we are doing the second part of a teaching I'm calling rite of passage. We're talking about the importance of marking and commemorating the most significant passage in a person's life: that moment when a person enters into Christ's discipleship community. And Christ commanded us to mark this rite of passage by an event called baptism and then commemorate it by a simple and meaningful ceremony that we call Lord's supper or communion.

This morning we are devoting the whole service to the Lord's supper and just as I sought to raise the value in our hearts of baptism last week. My hope is that we can do the same with the Lord's supper today. To do that we must start by deepening the understanding of its significance through teaching. But in addition I want to do something a little out of the ordinary to make today's observance stand out and be remembered. So what I want you to do is to come up to the front during while we sing "The Old Rugged Cross" and pick up one of these iron spikes. And I want you to hold it through out the remainder of the service.

Hopefully by then end of the service today you will not only gain a deepened meaning and understanding of the Lord's supper but associate this spike with today's experience as we commemorate the price paid to purchase our salvation and the call it places on our life.

Turn in your bible's to **Philip. 2:5-11** *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NASB)*

Now in this passage we are called to recognize that the cross didn't just happen to some ordinary human being who was strolling through life and wound up getting crucified. It wasn't a heavenly plan that went horribly wrong. No, It was a willful, planned out course that led Christ to the cross. He let go of equality with God and become a man, not just a man but a bond-servant to mankind. And as a servant to man he carried out his orders which were to humble himself and give up his life on a wooden cross.

Now the core of that passage is not just to point out what Christ did but to exhort you to do the same. Let that sink in. Have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus . . . What attitude? That is explained in the verses just above where Paul tells us to set aside self-serving ambitions, self-interest and so and instead take up a course like that of Christ.

Make the course of your life, not a day here and there, but the course of your life one which is not purely in self-interest but one in which you die to self a live for a cause much greater than your comfort, much greater than your ego, much greater than temporal wealth and health. Christianity is not something you fit into your life or something you fit your life around. It must become your life.

And as you will see, this is at the heart of commemorating the Lord's supper.

Let me take you now to a critical point in time during Jesus' earthly ministry. The point in time where he began talking to his disciples about his coming death. I found it interesting that he never talked about his death until after a conversation he had with his disciples about his being the Christ.

Once he went on record with who he was; once the disciples heard him accept that title then their brains would be off to the races on what that would mean for them. Power, money, influence, a place in the history books along side the one who would overthrow the Roman government. So he poured water all over it that.

**Matt 16:21** *"From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."*

Matthew and Mark record a very negative reaction to this. Peter actually rebuked Jesus. They didn't want to hear it.

Luke records a more detailed reply that indicates that not only does being the Christ call for him to die but it also calls those who would choose to associate themselves with him to die. Get the picture now. First there is the conversation about Him being the Christ. Then there is the announcement of his upcoming murder at the hands of the Jewish leaders. Then listen.

**Luke 9:23-25** *And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (NASB)*

"Peter, you are right. I am indeed the Christ! This position requires I suffer rejection and death. Those who follow me must also lose his life for my sake." Do you see the logic. This is a huge pill to swallow for these guys. One moment they are celebrating. We are the right hand guys to the long awaited Messiah. The next moment he is calling them to take up their cross and follow him to his death."

And periodically he would remind them, Hey guys pretty soon this is what is going to happen. One time after some miracles were performed and the people were all excited and celebrating he reminded them again.

**Luke 9:43-44** *And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."* (NASB)

And then a few verses later Luke gives us a window into the heart soul of Christ. **Luke 9:51** *And it came about, when the days were approaching for His ascension, that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem;* (NASB)

Determination. From this point forward everything pointed to his departure. His teaching of the disciples increased. More and more time with them less time with the crowds. Regular reminders to the disciples of what was going to happen. More intense calls of what it would cost to associate with him.

He began making statements like this. *"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* **Luke 9:58** (NASB)

**Luke 9:62** *But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (NASB)

**Luke 14:26** *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."* (NASB)

**Luke 14:33** *"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."* (NASB)

In store for you lay a life of selflessness. A life spent for the cause. No looking back. No greater loves. No other person can be more important, nor can possessions be more important. Following Christ is a life lived not for what lies ahead for us in this world but for what lies ahead for us in the next. That is why he told the Rich Young Ruler. Go sell all you have, give it away and come follow me. But the man refused.

Moments later Peter putting two and two together comments, "we have left everything to follow you, what then will there be for us?" **Matt 19:27**

**Luke 18:28-33** *And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life." (He is saying living for my cause will bring you more meaning and fulfillment in this world than you could ever give up for me. And to boot eternal life. Then once again he reminds them.) "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again."* (NASB)

Deep Breath --

He and the disciples finally arrive in Jerusalem and on the eve of Passover he calls them together for one final very special occasion before the cross. He gathers them together into a large room in the upstairs of someone's home. All the while the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees are cooking up a plan have him executed. Before the evening is done he will be in their custody and well on the way to that dreaded final descent to the ultimate act of servant leadership.

His words to them are filled with emotion.

"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. Here take this cup and share it among yourselves. This is the cup of redemption that we have drank from yearly since our people left Egypt. This represent my blood from here on out. The blood that was wiped over the door posts of our ancestors homes all these years foreshadowed this. Take it and drink. For it is my blood that makes clean and pardons you from judgment. I am the lamb of God.

Here take this bread now. This represents my body which is broken for you. Eat it. For I give myself in totality to you. I love you. I love you more than words can express. Please accept what I am offering to you.

That night marked a moment in those followers lives that they for sure never forgot.

And ever since that night people like them who have found forgiveness for our sins, who bear his name, all over this world gather together in little groups and big groups from time to time to simply do as he asked. To do what you do when you commemorate a rite of passage. You get together with others, reflect deeply and celebrate together. Pause

Now, Let's say you were among those who followed Christ in the flesh. You were there for the miracles, you were there for the words of life that would just flow from his lips. Words that tied up in knots the ones who tried to float him trick questions and trap him in some clever scheme. Every time he would turn it back on them with some astoundingly simple yet wise question. You just were in awe at every turn.

You were there for those times when he would remind you that true greatness was characterized by being a servant. You were there for the time when he said "No greater love has a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." But now he is gone and you pick up the communion cup and the little piece of bread and all this just comes rushing back into your mind.

"No greater love has a man than this," oh man, he was talking about his love for me when he said those words. He who is great among you must be least of all, if you want to lead then take up a towel and wash your brothers feet. If you want to be my disciple you must forsake all and come follow me; if you want to be my disciple you need to deny yourself and take up your cross every single day.

There you are the day rolls around some years after those days you walked right next to Christ saw all he did, heard all he said, watched him under bobbing torches get hauled away into the night. You remember the fear you felt for your life.

You remember those words of his just hours before. “you will all fall away from me this night.” Inside you told yourself never but you did. You can feel deep in your gut the pain of that night all over again.

You remember those few long days between the burial and the resurrection. You remember what it was like to witness him in his resurrected body; the remorse for not remaining faithful to him when it counted the most. You could hardly lift your head, yet he spoke comfort to you. But then he called you to lay it all down. You remember those last words he spoke before he left for the final time.

You shall be my witnesses, go make Christ-followers out of all nations. Speak to them all the words I have spoken to you. Go!! Go!! Share with others what I have done for you.

This is the kind of experience I think that the Lord’s table is meant to be. It is a time to allow the whole picture flood into your mind. The whole road to the cross. The whole of his teaching. The whole of his call upon your life to live the way he has taught, to fulfill the calling the cross puts upon your life. You are to remember not just the cross, not just the blood, not just the body. He says REMEMBER ME. REMEMBER ME.

Gather yourselves together from time to time and reflect upon these things. Reflect on what it tells us about how much he loves us. Reflect upon what it demands of us who would dare wear his name; who would dare be referred to as a Christ-follower. Think about the honor it is to associate yourself with him. And then eat and drink deeply from him. Celebrate the whole affair.

Remind yourself anew that it is no small thing to among the community of faith. It is no small thing to bear his name. it is no small thing to have your name written in the book of life. It is no small thing to have eternal hope to cling to as you live in this dark sorry world. It is no small thing to being among the few who have by God’s sovereign grace received the call out of darkness into his marvelous light.

He pursued you. Had he not pursued you would have never responded, you would have never been found. What does this require of those who would bear his name? Reflect upon this.

Jesus said, "Remember Me." How could anybody ever forget? Well, Jesus knows and understand how life will just fade the memory and wonder and worship of what Christ has done. Greed, worry, anxiety and just ordinary daily needs and responsibilities fill our minds and we just forget. Pretty soon we just forget that we are living for his cause, that we have accepted the call to give it all up for him.

That is why this rite of passage is to be done regularly? What happens over time in living day in and day out in the temporal world is that we forget what we are here for. We forget about our own cross. Our vision and passion leaks and is sapped from us and pretty soon we are not sacrificing anymore, we are not focused anymore, we are not living for his cause anymore. We are living for our cause.

The observance of the Lords table is one in which a community of people be it 5, 50 or 500 takes a piece of bread and cup of juice in their hand and they remember what they share in common with each other. Salvation, you bet, forgiveness of sins, praise God. But that's not all. It is not just the price he paid. It is also the call he made upon us to join the cause he laid his life down for. The cause of bringing the kingdom of God upon the earth. We are reminding ourselves that his blood and his body purchased us into that cause and we have the rest of our lives to give to it.

That's why this is a big deal. If you are a believer that is why you don't take it lightly. That is why if your not a Christ-follower you don't participate in this. Because when you eat that little piece of bread and drink that bit of juice your reaffirming to Christ that you exist not for yourself but as one of his. Your reminding yourself afresh the call the salvation he provides places on your life.

Today if you should be persuaded to place your faith completely in Jesus Christ, bow your knee in allegiance and submission, confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ pray with me and you may join with us and have your first true communion this morning.