

Looking to Jesus (taken from a discourse on the Lord's Supper and the object of the Christian's faith, by John Owen, June 8, 1673)

In Heb. 12:1-2 we read the words: ***"looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith."*** This is the author's exhortation to his readers to keep the main thing the main thing. Keep your eyes on the bull's eye of the target. It is in the same spirit of Jesus saying, ***"seek first the kingdom of heaven and all these things will be added to you"*** (Matt. 6:33). The Lord's Supper we take monthly allows us to focus on Jesus who is the object of our faith. In this way He is the object of our minds. He is the object of our hearts. Jesus tells us: ***"This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*** ***"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, remember me."*** With this in mind, I have 3 ways we can that will help us "look unto Jesus": 1) Consider the love of Christ, 2) Consider the sufferings of Christ, and 3) Consider the effects of his death. And then I will end with 3 applications.

1. Consider the Love of Christ. I don't understand the depths of the love of Christ, especially if one considers who we are. If you knew your spouse would cheat on you many times over and over and over again before you walked down the aisle, would you still marry him/her? Would you make that person an object of your love? This is how the Bible portrays us. Yet, we read about the steadfast love of God, and particularly the love of Christ for his people. The Apostle Paul describes himself in 1 Tim. as a ***"violent, blaspheming, persecuting, opponent"*** to the Gospel and God's people. He considered himself to be the CHIEF of sinners (v. 15). In that same passage he says, ***"the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."*** To the Galatians he says, ***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"*** (Gal. 2:20). And when Paul thought of this love, he could only say, ***"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"*** (1 Tim. 1:17).

One of the main things Paul prays for when he prays for believers is that they ***"know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"*** (Eph. 3:19). And, today, if you are in Christ, you cannot be separated from this love. Let's spend a moment reading from Rom. 8:34-39:

Pastor: Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Congregation: No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

With this in mind, as we take the Lord's Supper this morning, as we eat and drink, and see these elements, may we consider this great love and be moved deeply, that Christ may be more beautiful to us!

2. Consider the Sufferings of Christ. The elements we see, the elements we take and eat and drink, picture the body and blood of our Lord, the body and blood of a man who died. And in his life and his death, there was great suffering. This morning, the object of our faith is Christ and his suffering. Why did Jesus suffer? Well, he suffered by laying down his life as a sin offering. In the OT, the Israelites would bring their offerings to the priest. They would say to him, “*We have sinned. Please take this offering and sacrifice it in our place.*”

This morning, Christ is our sacrifice. But, it wasn’t a sinful man who offered up his life! The Bible says, “**He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself**” (Heb. 7:27). If you or I offer up ourselves to God as a sinner, we would be punished, and this punishment would bear the full extent that our sins deserve, which is separation from God in a place called hell . . . forever. And we would be FULLY deserving. But Christ knew no sin. He did not deserve what he received. Let’s read some verses together.

Pastor: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Cor. 5:21)

Congregation: *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.* (1 Pet. 3:18)

Pastor: Gal. 3:13: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.* (Gal. 3:13)

Congregation: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* (1 Pet. 2:24)

3. Consider the Effects of Christ’s Death. This morning, as we take and eat and drink, the object of our faith must be also upon WHAT the death of Christ has accomplished for us. I think about marriage. Marriage results in great effects. I’ve been married 31 years and the benefits and blessings are immense. I have a companion who cares for me and shares the difficulties of life. We help one another as we raise our children and (grandchildren). We help one another to make the best decisions together. The blessings are enormous from finances to love, to security, friendship, etc. In the same kind of way, being the bride of Christ is full of blessings. And these blessings flow particularly from his death we remember today.

Let’s consider some of the effects of Christ’s death from Eph. 1:3-14:

Pastor: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

Congregation: *In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

Pastor: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Congregation: *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

Pastor: *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Brothers and sisters, these are the effects of the death of Christ. These are the things that the Apostle Paul, along with us today, give thanks for; things we remember that flow from the death of Christ down to us. And practically, being forgiven by God, being reconciled to God, having our sins fall upon Christ and his righteousness to fall upon us is the greatest cause of peace. We have peace! Our guilt has been removed. The weight of my sin (your sin) is gone! Instead of a child of wrath, a child of the devil, I am now in the family of God. Let me ask, “*When you lay your head on your pillow at night, do you have peace?*”

When we consider the love of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, and the effects of Christ’s death, what do we do. I would like to finish this morning with 3 ways our faith is acted out.

1. Recognition. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper, we recognize the death of Christ. By faith, we look back at a past event. But, even though Christ’s death was over 2000 years ago, by faith, Christ’s death is present in our souls TODAY. His death, TODAY, is just as real as it was then. Where there is faith (real faith), there is the same advantage as the one who stood by the cross and watched him die. By faith, it is the same recognition it was 2000 years ago. In this way, we “remember.”

2. Humiliation. When we remember the cross of Christ, there should be a great sense of humiliation that floods our souls. The Apostle John stood by the cross as Jesus died. And he wrote in detail about what happened. In John 19:35-37, writing about himself, says: “**He who saw it has borne witness-- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth-- that you also may believe.**”³⁶ **For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.”**³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “**They will look on him whom they have pierced.**” Here, John is quoting a passage from Zechariah when he looks forward to a day when Israel will mourn as they remember whom they have pierced. And they will mourn like they had just lost their firstborn child. But, in that context Zechariah speaks of a great day in the future when God will restore his people. And John takes these words and applies them to the death of Christ.

Today, when we consider Christ’s death on the cross, we come by a humble faith as we KNOW “MY SINS PUT HIM THERE.” It was for me he died. And, I’m the one who has always been

unfaithful, unloving, unkind. Yet, he loves me still. When we consider Christ and what he did for us, we are humbled. **“But while we were yet still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Rom. 5:8).

3. Thankfulness. Finally, we give thanks! We give thanks for great wisdom of God in the great plan of history to save his people. We give thanks to Christ for his great for us. There is nothing in this world that give the Christian a more thankful heart than the cross of Christ. Our sins are covered.

Today, as we take the Lord’s Supper, if you find that your faith “leaps” within you as you consider: 1) the love of Christ; 2) the sufferings of Christ; 3) the effects of Christ’s death, then this supper is beneficial to your faith. Oh, God is good to give us such a feast!