



Preacher's Pen

by Gene McCoy

COMMUNION AND THE GIVING OF THANKS

On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." NLT

Other translations do not say that He gave thanks for the bread, but simply that He took bread and, when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

The Greek word in this verse is that from which we derive the English word "Eucharist," which connotes the giving of thanks – thanksgiving. The Lord's Supper is an appropriate occasion for the giving of thanks. It is easy to understand why we would give thanks in the commemoration of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. But it is Jesus Who is here giving thanks to God. It is on the night of His betrayal. He sees the cross on the horizon. And, yet, He gives thanks.

The Bible records four times when Jesus presided over a meal. Once was when He miraculously fed more than 5,000 people. Another was when He miraculously fed over 4,000 people. Luke 24 records His meal with two men from Emmaeus after His resurrection from the dead. The Passover supper with His disciples is the other occasion. At each of these meals Jesus first gave thanks to God. We have learned from His example to give thanks for our daily bread. But there must be more to His giving of thanks when He instituted this supper. There is more to learn here than that it is good to give thanks when we eat.

Jesus and the disciples were observing the Passover. That feast celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. That was something worthy of thanking God. The Passover anticipated the sacrifice at Calvary. In the Lord's Supper we commemorate our deliverance from bondage to sin through the sacrifice of Jesus.

That background possibly explains a reason Jesus gave thanks as He broke the bread. Jesus came to be the sacrificial Passover lamb that would offer deliverance from sin's guilt and consequences. Jesus may have been giving thanks that His earthly mission was coming to a close; that the eternal redemption of broken sinners was about to be secured by His broken body on the tree. So Jesus was possibly giving thanks on our behalf, knowing that His broken body on the cross effected our healing.

As we break this bread and drink this cup, we have great reason to give thanks. With his blood we were purchased; with his body we were freed. Giving thanks is the least we can do. But giving thanks is not words merely spoken. Giving thanks is in doing. The doing of gratitude involves sacrifice.

Jesus gave thanks as He instituted the very commemoration of His body being broken on our behalf. By partaking of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we are renewing our commitment to present our bodies as living sacrifices; that, like our Lord, we are willing to sacrifice all in our mission to seek and to save the lost.

As we break the bread and drink the cup, therefore, let us give thanks that we, being liberated from the guilt and penalty of sin, have the privilege to sacrifice our lives in service so that others may receive His wonderful redemption.