

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz production
Week 23
Matthew 26, Mark 14, John 13

“Looking up from water’s edge, past the eager crowds seeking baptism at his hand, John, called the Baptist, saw in the distance his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, striding resolutely toward him to make a request for that same ordinance. Reverently, but audible enough for those nearby to hear, John uttered the admiration that still moves us two millennia later: “Behold the Lamb of God.”¹

It is instructive that this long-prophesied forerunner to Jesus did not call Him “Jehovah” or “Savior” or “Redeemer” or even “the Son of God”—all of which were applicable titles. No, John chose the earliest and perhaps most commonly recognized image in the religious tradition of his people. He used the figure of a sacrificial lamb offered in atonement for the sins and sorrows of a fallen world and all the fallen people in it.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/28holland?lang=eng>

Those are the opening words from President Holland in a talk given not too long ago in general conference. This week we get to study about the institution of the Holy Sacraments introduced by the Savior of the world. The sacrament can be a hard thing to understand. We participate in this ordinance every week. Repeated more often than any other ordinance in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You would think that something so common in the church would be a lot more understood. If it was, the feeling during the sacrament would be very different. You would look around and see an abundance of tears throughout the congregation.

I hope to share some thoughts this week that will change how we approach the sacred emblems that come to us from those holy alters.

In the time of Jesus the practice used, was one commanded by God from the day Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of Eden. Every year each Christian would select a first born lamb free of blemish to sacrifice to God as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for them that was to

come. I'm sure there were few back then that truly understood what it was they were doing as they presented that lamb before the priest that would spill its innocent blood. In fact at the time of the passover as thousands would gather at Jerusalem for the celebration it was estimated that about 250,000 lambs were slaughtered...250,000. Just as in our day the practice may have become more of a routine or a ritual than an actual changing or turning of the heart to God. President Holland said it this way:

“Unfortunately, as a symbol of genuine repentance and faithful living, this ritualistic offering of unblemished little lambs didn’t work very well, as so much of the Old Testament reveals. The moral resolve that should have accompanied those sacrifices sometimes didn’t last long enough for the blood to dry upon the stones.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/28holland?lang=eng>

Jesus was the end to this type of sacrament. In the upper room a gathering known as the last supper “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.” (Matt 26:26-28)

On another occasion Jesus said: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

49 Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. (John 6:35, 26-28,49-55)

If Jesus taught this so plainly, I feel that this is important to understand so that we can make the weekly sacramental service so much more meaningful. It all starts with our perspective. Elder Christofferson told this story:

“Not long ago, a friend recounted to me an experience he had while serving as a mission president. He had undergone a surgery that required several weeks of recuperation. During his recovery, he devoted time to searching the scriptures. One

afternoon as he pondered the Savior's words in the [27th chapter of 3 Nephi](#), he drifted off to sleep. He subsequently related:

“I fell into a dream in which I was given a vivid, panoramic view of my life. I was shown my sins, poor choices, the times ... I had treated people with impatience, plus the omissions of good things I should have said or done. ... [A] comprehensive ... [review of] my life was shown to me in just a few minutes, but it seemed much longer. I awoke, startled, and ... instantly dropped to my knees beside the bed and began to pray, to plead for forgiveness, pouring out the feelings of my heart like I had never done previously.

“Prior to the dream, I didn't know that I [had] such great need to repent. My faults and weaknesses suddenly became so plainly clear to me that the gap between the person I was and the holiness and goodness of God seemed [like] millions of miles. In my prayer that late afternoon, I expressed my deepest gratitude to Heavenly Father and to the Savior with my whole heart for what They had done for me and for the relationships I treasured with my wife and children. While on my knees I also felt God's love and mercy that was so palpable, despite my feeling so unworthy. ...

“I can say I haven't been the same since that day. ... My heart changed. ... What followed is that I developed more empathy toward others, with a greater capacity to love, coupled with a sense of urgency to preach the gospel. ... I could relate to the messages of faith, hope, and the gift of repentance found in the Book of Mormon [as] never before.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2017/10/the-living-bread-which-came-down-from-heaven?lang=eng>

I believe that this is the key to an impactful sacrament ordinance for each of us. We have all had the chance to reflect on past sins and mistakes during the sacrament, but do we truly feel the scoop and magnitude of all our sins placed upon the shoulders of an innocent, blameless

sacrificial lamb who would willingly lay down His life for such a sinner like you and me? As we sing that hymn while the priests tear His flesh, and recite that covenantal prayer, that as we take of this broken bread we do it in remembrance of Him. And as He took our sin upon Him, He is asking that we take upon us His name, and strive to keep His Commandments. And always remember Him. And if we do He will bless us with His spirit always. That is the covenant relationship that we renew and recommit to every week. We promise God three things and in return He promises us three things:

We promise:

- To take upon us His name.
- Always remember Him.
- And keep His commandments.

And in return God promises us:

- That He will provide a Savior for us, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
- That Jesus will take upon Him ALL of our sins. Leaving us blameless.
- And He will send His Spirit to be with us Always.

Yea, I know. Seems very lopsided. We gain so much for so little. If you are having a hard time comprehending what it is we are asked to do and what it is we receive in return let me phrase it in more modern terms:

We promise:

- To help anyone that God places in our path as He would do.
- Keep our thoughts and lives focused on God and His will.
- And try to do as the Spirit directs you to do every day.

And in return, God will:

- Not condemn you to Hell for the mistakes you've made and the sins you have done.
- He will forgive you, and give you Heavenly life after this mortal life is done.
- And He will send His angels to constantly watch over and protect you.
- And if we mess up and fail this week, He promises us that He will forgive us and let us try again next week and the week after until we can get it right.

What a merciful and wonderful, loving Father who knows His flawed children so well. He knows those times when we forgot Him. Those times when we slipped and hurt others around us. Sometimes I think we forget too easily the small sins that caused Jesus so much pain. Might we remember more clearly our own contribution to the torture and crushing agony suffered by the innocent, blameless, perfect lamb of God.

In His name I pray, even Jesus Christ, Amen.