

# CHRISTIAN STANDARD

Founded 1866  
By ISAAC ERRETT

Devoted to the restoration of primitive Christianity, its doctrines, its ordinances, and its fruits

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## "He . . . Gave Thanks"

THE last passover supper that Jesus was to share with His disciples had come to an end. What remained of the boiled lamb and bitter herbs grew cold upon the table. At one side of the room the basin and towel were mute reminders of the lesson in humility that the Master had endeavored to impress upon His companions of the Way. He had taught them, He had calmed their fears, He had prayed for them. Soon He would lead them out to the Garden of Gethsemane where would begin the swirling current of events that would lead to Calvary. The betrayer had already left their midst.

But before bringing the party in the upper room to a close, He took from the remnants of the meal one of the flat loaves of unleavened bread and a cup of the sweet wine. Holding up the loaf before them He blessed it, broke it, and distributed it to them, with the instruction, "Take, eat; this is my body." They did not understand all that was implied, any more than we comprehend all the mystical symbolism of the broken loaf.

"And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

He gave thanks. Some other time we may expound upon the Lord's Supper as an ordinance, but just now we wish to explore the less familiar territory of our Lord's thanksgiving. "He took the cup, and gave thanks."

He was busy, but He gave thanks. Never was a night filled with so many important, last minute things to do. The time of His departure was at hand. He had so many things to say to His disciples, so many last words of counsel, admonition, and instruction to leave with them. For three and a half years he had been engaged in a ministry of ceaseless activity. And now, just as the current of the river swiftens in the rapids just before it plunges over the falls, so the activity of Jesus had accelerated with His entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of

this last week. This evening in particular was a busy one, with the passover supper, the teaching, the prayer meeting, and now the institution of the memorial feast. Soon He was to be rushed from the Garden of Gethsemane, through a series of sham trials, and on to Calvary. There was no sleep for Him that night. But He took time to give thanks.

He faced death, but He gave thanks. The cross loomed before Him. It was certain, and He knew it. Consistent with the Father's will, He could not escape it. Rather than give way to His own dread He had calmed the fears of His companions: "Let not your hearts be troubled." The cup itself was a symbol of death. "This is my blood of the new testament." Only by drinking to its dregs the bitter cup of death could He become the perfect Saviour of mankind. With the cup in His hand, He gave thanks.

He was soon to be forsaken by His disciples and companions, to be betrayed by one and denied by another, but He gave thanks. Lonely, misunderstood, soon to be mocked, scourged, spat upon, and crucified, He gave thanks.

He gave thanks for all the loving Father's power and love and care that lay liquid in the cup of paschal wine. Out on the hillsides of Judea, famous for its vineyards since the days when the spies returned from Eshcol, sun and rain had performed their alchemy within the plump purple clusters. For soil and sun and rain, and for the divine creative process of life and growth He gave thanks.

For the exacting toil and skill that had brought the fruit of the vine to the cup on the table, He gave thanks. Caring for a vineyard demands long days of labor, combined with skill and knowledge. With only the New Testament as a vinedresser's manual, one comes to understand that a tremendous amount of work goes into tending and

fertilizing, trimming and pruning. The grape must be picked when it is just ripe enough, neither too acid nor over-sweet. Crushing the juice from the fruit and preparing it for the household table demands a technical skill born from pride of workmanship. And from the vineyard and the wine vat it must be transported and marketed. For all the labor and care that produced the wine in the cup, He gave thanks.

For the companions and disciples who shared the cup, He gave thanks. "Drink ye all of it," He directed. That is, "All of you drink of it." It is a common cup, a communal cup, a communion cup, a cup of sharing. "Are ye able," He had asked on one occasion, "to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" Now they were drinking of the cup received from His extended hand. "We are able," they had replied, little realizing the import of their own words. Soon they were to prove that they were able, as He enabled them. They would drink from the cup, and share not only its blessings, but the cup itself, the cup of death and suffering. Not only the disciples present in the room that night, but "a great multitude which no man could number," made up of those through following ages who should "believe on [Jesus] through their word," were to share the cup. For the simple in heart, for the "babes" to whom His Word and His Way should be revealed, He gave thanks. He gave thanks for you, and for us, that night.

Thanksgiving is a Christian virtue. Grace is the root of gratitude. Our Master set the example. He gave thanks for blessings unseen, even when outward circumstances might seem to militate against any feeling of gratitude. He gave thanks when there was not enough to go around, and fed the multitude. He gave thanks for the scraps left from the passover feast, and instituted the Lord's Supper, which is still observed every Lord's Day, in remembrance of Him. And wherever His Word and His Spirit have gone, there has been the grace of gratitude and the spirit of thanksgiving.

As a nation we have been blessed with abundant material benefits. For these we may properly give thanks, but our thanksgiving should not stop there. These shall pass away. We should be even more grateful for those things which can not be shaken—the eternal Word, the eternal kingdom, the eternal city, and eternal life. All these are the possession of the partakers of the cup. Let us give thanks.

Vol. XC, Number 47. The CHRISTIAN STANDARD, published weekly at 26 E. Central Parkway, Cincinnati 10, Ohio. Entered as second-class matter, Jan. 31, 1880, at the post office at Cincinnati, O., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Address all communications in care of the Standard Publishing Company, Box 55, Sta. V, Cincinnati 10, Ohio. Subscription rates per year: \$2.00 (40 cents postage for Canadian subscriptions, \$1.05 postage for foreign subscriptions). Single copy, five cents. Club rates: Five or more copies to one address, \$1.75 each per year or 45 cents per quarter.