



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>

*Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio*

## TRANSCRIPT

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### "The Lord's Supper"

**Guest:**

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**WILKEN:** Greetings, and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in.

Okay, we're coming up on Holy Week. Maundy Thursday heads the show, you might say. This week, and perhaps this week only, you will see on television popular televangelists, maybe for the only time during the year, celebrating the Lord's Supper. I don't know what they think they're doing. What *are* they doing? Is this Lord's Supper merely a reenactment, a play-acting of what happened so long ago in the upper

room with Jesus and His disciples? I've seen a couple of these television evangelists do the Lord's Supper, right around the time of Holy Week and Maundy Thursday, and it looks like they're trying to reenact something. When Jesus says, "This *is* my body, this *is* my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," what does He say? Should we take Him at His word? And if we do, what does that mean the Lord's Supper is, and what does it mean the Lord's Supper is for us?

Our guest this evening, Pastor Matt Harrison, is a regular here on the program. He is Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Matt, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

**HARRISON:** Good evening, Todd. Always a pleasure to be with you and your listeners.

**WILKEN:** Let's go back to the first Lord's Supper, to that upper room where Jesus is with his disciples on the night when he is betrayed – the first Maundy Thursday, if you will. What is Jesus doing there in that upper room with his disciples?

**HARRISON:** Jesus asked His disciples to go ahead of Him into Jerusalem and to find a place, which He had known about, to celebrate the Passover meal with them; the last Passover before His own Passion. And the Passover meal was something celebrated by the Jews through the centuries, as commanded and mandated by the Lord, right in Exodus. And you remember, after the plagues that struck the Egyptians, Pharaoh hardened his heart, and finally the Lord threatened a final plague, a plague of the firstborn. Before that plague hit, the Lord commanded His people – He said, "Pick out a spotless lamb; take that lamb and sacrifice it, and sprinkle the blood of that lamb upon the lintel, upon the doorposts, and then consume that Passover lamb with your clothes on, your loins girded, ready to move. And then when the Angel of Death comes over Egypt to kill all the firstborn, that Angel would mark those doors marked by the blood of the perfect lamb, and pass over." There would be redemption and life for those marked by the blood of the lamb. Jesus celebrates that Passover, and more than that, He really shows Himself to be the fulfillment of that Passover. In fact, St. Paul tells us that very thing in 1 Corinthians 5:7. He says, "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the Festival, not with the old leaven of malice and evil, but with the

new bread of sincerity and truth." Christ was putting Himself in as the final, great Passover Lamb. "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!" John the Baptizer said.

**WILKEN:** With that said, how are we then to take Jesus' words when He deviates radically from the Passover at one point, and says of the bread, "This is my body," and says of the cup and its contents, "This is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Eat it. Drink it."

**HARRISON:** The Lord is instituting something which is deeply connected to the past, and even foretold by the past, and giving it a completely new meaning and fulfillment, and putting Himself into the Passover in a final and radical way, which alters all of history.

**WILKEN:** What does it mean, then, that Scripture, at least on one occasion – I think Paul, in 1 Corinthians refers to this as "the Lord's Supper." Why is that significant?

**HARRISON:** Well, this reality of the Lord's Supper, which I think we are so often tempted to merely look at as though it were another action on the Christian's part to show dedication to God, something that were unessential to the Gospel. This is the Lord's own doing and His own last will and testament. It's called a *diapheke* [in Greek] in the New Testament: that means even more than a covenant – "a testament." On the most solemn night of His life, before He is handed over to His crucifixion, this is what the Lord wills to give His disciples. And He says, "Do this as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. This is my body, this is my blood." And so we have from the Lord His last will and testament, and He says it is to be done often.

**WILKEN:** So let's clarify that. Is this, the Lord's Supper, an ordinance that Christ left before His crucifixion and resurrection and ascension for He left His disciples to do as

mere memorial? In other words, is this something we need to do to remember Him, or is this the Lord's work, when we call it the Lord's Supper?

**HARRISON:** It is the Lord's work. In fact, Martin Luther got it right when he said, "The Sacrament is the Gospel." "This is my body, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," it's the Lord's own doing, the Lord's action, the Lord's body and blood to which He ties the forgiveness of sins.

**WILKEN:** Now, you just quoted Luther: "The Sacrament" – referring to the Lord's Supper – "is the Gospel." Someone says, "Matt, the Gospel is what happened at the cross. The Gospel is Jesus shedding His blood for us and dying at the cross, and rising again after three days. How can you or Luther even say the Sacrament is the Gospel?"

**HARRISON:** We have to take a look at the words. We call them the Words of Institution: "Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Is Jesus speaking in kind of a symbolic way? Well, unfortunately, the New Testament never uses the word "symbol" for the Lord's Supper. Ever. And there's also quite a strong indication in the New Testament that the Lord actually meant what He said when He said, "This *is* my body; this, which I'm holding in my hands, is my blood."

**WILKEN:** This runs entirely counter to our senses, to our reason.

**HARRISON:** It does indeed. And I think it points to the way God works. The Lord's Supper is intimately bound up with the whole Christian faith in a way that I think is quite surprising. We see that it is the Gospel, because in the purest sense, the Christian merely receives – recognizing his own sinfulness, he merely receives and lays hold of the gift delivered.

**WILKEN:** What is that gift?

**HARRISON:** The gift is the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And even more so, the ancient fathers of the Church called the Lord's Supper "the medicine of immortality." And they did this based upon John 6: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, I shall raise him up on the last day." This flesh and blood of Christ is the medicine of immortality, which guarantees resurrection for us. Jesus Himself points to that, right when He gives the Words of Institution, especially in Luke's Gospel. He says, "I will not drink of it again until I drink of it with you in the Kingdom." He's speaking of the resurrection right there.

**WILKEN:** Our guest, Pastor Matt Harrison, is Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. We're talking this evening on *Issues, Etc.* about the Lord's Supper. So far, we know why it's called "the Lord's Supper." Not only did He institute this as a fulfillment of the sacrifice made at the Passover; now He is the Lamb, the one spotless Lamb made for the rescue and redemption of all men. But we also know that in calling it the Lord's Supper, it is the Lord's work; it's not our work. Not a mere reenactment or playacting to simply remember a distant Savior, but in fact Christ Himself coming to serve us with His body and blood, for us to eat and to drink.

Now, does this baffle the senses? Without a doubt. It baffles my senses! But where do we put our attention on the Lord's Supper? Upon what the Lord says it is, and not what we think we can understand it to be. He says, "This is my body for you, my blood for you."

When we come back, an objection often raised, even within Christian circles, about the Lord's Supper. Maybe Jesus is simply speaking metaphorically, as when He says, "I am the vine." We'll answer that after this break.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** All right, a common objection regarding the Lord's Supper, Matt, is that we are, at least so far in our conversation, misreading Jesus. He did not ever intend to be taken literally when He said, "This is my body, this is my blood." But He intended was in a more obvious sense that our reason *can* grasp, which is, "This bread symbolizes, represents my body. This cup symbolizes, represents my blood." You said Scripture does not permit for that reading of Jesus' words. Why so? How do you respond?

**HARRISON:** You know, Todd, I believed that position at one time, before I really took a serious look at the New Testament. There are a couple of things that really convinced me. First off, the words themselves. Now, Jesus uses metaphorical language in many places: "I am the vine, you are the branches," etc. The question is, is Jesus using metaphorical language here? Now, if Jesus would have said, "Take, eat, this is fish; or take, eat, this is very good bread," there would be absolutely no question about what He was saying. But the fact is, He says here, very clearly, "Take, eat; this, which I am holding, is my body. This cup of wine *is* my blood, shed for you. Take it." Now, if I were to reject that, I would have to say, "Well, it doesn't square with reason that Jesus would give such a gift. It seems absurd." But if I take the same principle, for instance, and look at John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," well, John is not talking about Jesus as God in the real sense; he's talking about Jesus as some sort of God.

**WILKEN:** Or a symbol.

**HARRISON:** Or a small god, or a symbol of God. Very quickly, you lose the heart of the faith. So the question is not whether Jesus uses symbolic language or metaphorical language. He does often in the New

Testament. The question is, is he, in fact, using it here? Now, there are many other things that come to bear. Paul, in probably the earliest written account in 1 Corinthians – people don't realize 1 Corinthians was probably written at least as early, or earlier, as the earliest Gospel – Paul speaks in very realistic terms. He says, "If you're guilty of not discerning the body of Christ's presence, then you're guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 11. Just before that, in 1 Corinthians 10, he says, "Is the cup not a *koinonia* [*in Greek*], a 'participation' in the blood of Christ? Is the bread not a participation in the body of Christ, a partaking of that thing?" So the New Testament witness is rather solid on the issue, and I'm forced, really, to take my reason captive and give Jesus the benefit of the doubt.

**WILKEN:** So if there had been a misunderstanding, Paul would have had ample opportunity to correct it, because, after all, Paul is there explaining what the Lord's Supper is, and he doesn't try to clarify Jesus' clear words. Maybe in a more practical sense for us every day, for those who participate in the Lord's Supper, what's the pastor holding in his hand? What is being put into our mouths to eat and drink?

**HARRISON:** We confess that when a church confesses that this is the Lord's body and blood, and that when this meal is repeated with the very words of Christ, the pastor holds in his hand Christ's very body and blood to be received by those who believe it and those who don't believe it. Paul says, "Those who receive it unworthily are guilty of profaning that very body and blood." So the pastor doles out the body and blood of Christ. How, I have no idea. I have no idea how bread and wine can at the same time be body and blood. We don't try to figure that out; we don't try to answer the minute questions over how that can be. We just confess that that's what it is in a miraculous way.

**WILKEN:** That sounds, some would say, very Roman Catholic.

**HARRISON:** Well, it just so happens that Roman Catholics are not wrong in everything. And it just so happens that the Roman Catholics, while they tried to explain the real presence with the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, which says that the bread turns into body, such that bread is no longer actually there, that's a way to try to philosophically understand or explain the real presence. Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, and Lutherans all confess this so-called "real presence" of the body and blood of Christ.

**WILKEN:** With about a minute here, and I want to do more Scripture on the other side of this break, but before we're up against this break, take us through a couple places, other places in Scripture that speak clearly of the Lord's Supper. Where would you go first, beyond the Words of Institution in the Gospels?

**HARRISON:** We have the Words of Institution in three of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We don't have the Words of Institution clearly in John; however, we have this intriguing passage in John 6, where he says, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you have no life in you." I believe that what's happening there, John is writing his gospel toward the end of the first century, he's writing in a context where there is deep misunderstanding and antagonism from those who do not understand the Gospel or Christ. And he's writing in a context where many are denying the incarnation of Jesus. Those who deny the incarnation always ended up denying the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament. So John is using very realistic language: "Eat my flesh, drink my blood."

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** We talked before the break about the way Matthew, Mark, and Luke deal with the Lord's Supper in the Words of Institution, and the unique way that John deals with the Lord's Supper in his Gospel. What does Paul give us? You've mentioned a couple passages already.

**HARRISON:** Yeah, 1 Corinthians 10. Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" That word *koinonia* there means "participation, taking part of." It's sometimes translated, "communion, communing with."

**WILKEN:** Is this why we call it Holy Communion, by the way?

**HARRISON:** It is, because the Latin translation of the Greek here is "communion." "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" And then he goes on to say that because there's one bread, many are one body, for we all partake of one bread. By partaking of the bread and wine, body and blood, the Lord not only forgives us – "Given and shed for you for forgiveness" – but He also makes us into something that we weren't before: He makes us one. And it's no coincidence that, following his teaching on the Lord's Supper, Paul immediately starts saying things like "If one member of the body suffers, do not all suffer with it?" So Todd, you go along and you kick a chair with your little toe – you don't just say, "Oh, it's just my little toe, it's small; it's only a few centimeters long, no problem." No, you bend over, you grab your toe, your whole face puckers up, you're screaming to high heaven because your toe is hurting! Well, it's just a little toe. So also with the body of Christ: because of the Lord's Supper, we are made one, and when any one of us, anyone of the least is suffering anything, the body cares, loves, is concerned for. It can't be any other way.

**WILKEN:** And when Paul says of the Lord's Supper later, and he chides the Corinthians

for their misuse of the Lord's Supper – this is the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter – what is his deep concern about the Corinthians' abuse?

**HARRISON:** Well, they were getting together, some, as he says, in what is commonly called the "agape meal." Somehow there was a larger meal associated with the [Lord's] Supper in the earliest times in Corinth, which soon fell away, we know, in the early history of the Church. But some were getting drunk, and some weren't eating at all. And then he says, "I receive from the Lord what I delivered to you: On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus 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.'" And the word 'remembrance' is well and good; we believe the Supper is a remembering of Christ's sacrifice and His blessings for us. But it is also more than that. It's body and blood, given and shed. "In the same way, He took the cup after supper: 'This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" Then he goes on to say, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." What do you proclaim by partaking? You receive the Lord's gifts, and you receive them in faith, and right there by receiving you're saying, "I believe the Gospel."

You know, the sacrifice language – Hebrews says "the sacrifice has been made once for all." There is no re-sacrifice of Christ in the Lord's Supper. It's a done deal. But because we know Christ is sacrificed, and body and blood is given, the Gospel is always front and center. There was a sacrifice, once for all for sins. The benefits are continually delivered over time.

And then Paul goes on to say, "Everyone should examine himself and then eat of the bread and drink the cup, for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning,

recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself." Now, some have said he's just talking about the body as the Church, the Body of Christ. I think Paul's probably talking in double entendre here, and he's concerned that the Corinthians aren't recognizing the Church; that is, others as Christians. And also, they're doing that because they're not recognizing the body and blood of Christ, which is present. And he says when that happens, you are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. The Greek word there means you're guilty of sinning against something that is present.

**WILKEN:** Let's go to the phones and talk first with Cynthia. She listens on WAVA in Washington, D.C. Cynthia, thank you for waiting – welcome to *Issues, Etc.*

**CYNTHIA:** I've got a question about communion. Is the wine that we serve – is it juice from the vine, or is it the wine with the alcohol in it?

**WILKEN:** Cynthia, thank you for the question.

**HARRISON:** Thank you, Cynthia. There has been no such thing as non-alcoholic wine up until the last century. In fact, what we know as the famous Welch's grape juice originally came out as Welch's non-alcoholic communion wine. The early Church did not have the process for pasteurization, and so it was impossible not to have alcoholic wine. We know this from the New Testament, that Jesus used wine – "There is to be no drunkenness." St. Paul says to Timothy, "Take a little wine for your stomach." Jesus turned water into wine; about 150 gallons of it at the wedding at Cana. So we follow the Lord's mandate when we use, also, real wine in the Lord's Supper.

**WILKEN:** And as to the bread, it is a safe educated guess that Jesus was using an unleavened bread during this Passover?

**HARRISON:** The period is a period of the unleavened – all the leaven was to be removed from the household during this period of seven days around the Passover. Leaven symbolized something that has sort of a negative fermenting effect on life, like sin. St. Paul says, “Get rid of the leaven of sin and malice and vice.” Yeah, so Jesus most likely used unleavened bread.

**WILKEN:** Some churches openly use grape juice, because they misread Scripture on the whole issue of alcohol and wine and things like that. They say, “Well, we couldn’t use wine, because it in and of itself is bad, so we’re going to use grape juice.” Or some churches nowadays on the more liberal end are even substituting all sorts of other things for bread and wine themselves. Do they have the Lord’s Supper? What’s going on?

**HARRISON:** If you don’t have what the Lord has given, if you don’t do what the Lord has given us to do, and believe what the Lord has said about it, then all things are rendered doubtful. If it’s doubtful, then it’s not the Gospel, it’s not the surety, it’s not the Lord’s giving. The Lord doesn’t give us anything that is to render us in doubt about His forgiveness.

**WILKEN:** So the elements themselves, the bread and the wine, are important insofar as this is what Christ used, and we are not to tamper with that.

**HARRISON:** Clearly so. Absolutely. It’s just like in baptism; you don’t use other things in baptism other than water.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** We’re talking about the Lord’s Supper. Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest.

Back to the phones, Bill is calling from St. Paul, Minnesota. He listens on KKMx. Bill, welcome.

**BILL:** Hi, Todd. I personally believe in the real presence, but the argument has been made – and I’m wondering if your guest might address it – that Jesus was speaking in Aramaic, and that He would have said, “This, my body; this, my blood” without the word ‘is,’ and that the Gospel writers, translating his Aramaic words into Greek translated it “This *is* my body; this *is* my blood.”

**WILKEN:** What would the point of that argument be then, Bill?

**BILL:** Well, the point of that argument would be that Jesus didn’t really make it clear whether He was saying “This is” or “This represents” or “This symbolizes” – that He just said “This, my body; this, my blood.”

**WILKEN:** Bill, thanks for the question. Matt, how would you respond to that argument?

**HARRISON:** I actually took Aramaic too long ago. But I think fundamentally, if you believe the texts of the New Testament are determinative, and it is in fact the texts of the New Testament the Lord wished His Church to have – and I think you can make that argument, simply by noting that the Lord gave us the Bible in Greek, not Aramaic, and He gave us the Bible in Koine Greek, or “common Greek,” which was spoken all throughout the Mediterranean world, so that the message of Christ could be diffused broadly. Every Greek text says – and I have my Greek text right here, 1 Corinthians 11 – and He said, “*touto mou estin to soma, this is my body. This bread.*” And I don’t really think, even if you would say, “Take away the word ‘is,’” you still have the subject, “this.” What’s he talking about? “This, what I have in my hand.” Even if you understand “is” as the verb, you still have the predicate – “my body.” It’s like a mathematical equation: “this” equals “my body.”

**WILKEN:** If anything, the argument that – and this is certainly true, Jesus probably

spoke Aramaic – the disciples, some years later, are writing in Greek. The argument is that they somehow speculatively put in “is,” when in fact this is what they understood Jesus exactly to mean. “This is my body.”

**HARRISON:** Absolutely.

**WILKEN:** The whole argument Bill has raised there, on behalf of others – I don’t think he believes it – really argues in favor of the disciples understanding Jesus to say “This is my body.”

**HARRISON:** They clearly did. And you know what was so amazing for me, serving ten years in the parish, I met some very old people. In my last parish, I had a woman, 104 years old, who was regularly in church and going to the Lord’s Supper. Now, if I had told that woman, “The pastor who confirmed you when you were 14 years old, in roughly 1912 or 1913, was a drunk,” what would she say to me? “No, he wasn’t. I knew the man!” And the New Testament period is very significant in that you do not have a witness of people within the Church coming forward and saying, “Jesus didn’t say ‘This is my body’ or mean that at all!” If, in fact, Jesus would not have meant what He said, there certainly would have been an uproar in the church contradicting the witness of the apostles written down in the Bible. In fact, you have quite the opposite. You have, right away, into the earliest period – I have a text of Ignatius, who was a disciple of John – he’s writing before he dies in about 112. He says about the Gnostics, “They abstain from the Eucharist because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins.” And really, the deeper issue, Todd, is how a philosophy of Platonism works its way over Christianity.

**WILKEN:** Let’s go to the phones again with Marlene. She listens in Wisconsin Rapids, WI, on WGNV. Marlene, welcome.

**MARLENE:** Hello.

**HARRISON:** Hi, Marlene.

**MARLENE:** I live across from a Catholic Church, and right now, 24/7, there are cars always at this building, and I want to ask my Catholic friends what is over there. There is a bowl with bread in it, and it cannot be left alone because it is Jesus. And I asked, “Well, you mean it’s a symbol of Jesus?” And they said, “No, it’s Jesus.” So this thing goes on about two months, and I can see it right across the street here – there are always cars there, always lights flashing, making pretty designs, and inside there, my friends that go there say there’s a bowl with bread in it. Now, they don’t eat that bread. So what is that?

**WILKEN:** Marlene, that’s a good question.

**HARRISON:** Great question. This was actually an issue that really divided the first Protestants as the Lutherans from the Catholics. The Lutherans argued that Jesus said, “Take, eat; take, drink.” He didn’t say, “Consecrate the elements, bless them, and then put them in a box and carry them around, put them in a bowl and have a vigil beside them.” Or the Corpus Christi Festival – you know the town Corpus Christi in Texas, which means “the body of Christ.” What would happen, and still happens in the Corpus Christi Festival in the Roman Catholic Church is the elements are consecrated by the priest, then they are put in a monstrance of some sort, to be carried around and venerated by people. We believe that the New Testament does not give us that mandate to do that. We also believe that outside of what the Lord has given us the body and blood for, it is not the Lord’s Supper.

**WILKEN:** The great comfort in certainty lies not in my ability to understand this Supper. Just this morning, I received from my pastor’s hand the body of Christ and the blood of Christ. He gave it to me with these words: “This is the body of Christ; this is His blood, for you for the forgiveness of sins.” I



do not understand how that can be. He is simply repeating what Jesus said to His disciples, on that first Maundy Thursday, that first Lord's Supper. I doubt they understand how it could be, either. The goal here is not to understand, but to believe. And even then my doubt reigns supreme, but the Lord's Supper – there's no doubt about that. His words are stronger than my doubt. What Christ speaks, He speaks certainly and for the assurance of sinners just like me. And what He gives, He gives certainly for the assurance of sinners just like me. If He promises that it is His body

and blood, then it is. His word will reign over my doubt. And if He promises it is for the forgiveness of sins and it is for me, a sinner, then in spite of my doubts His word will reign over, even through doubts as well. Christ's words speak clear, certain comfort to sinners there in His Supper, and He gives them what His words say and what His words promise: the forgiveness of sins, won by Him at the cross.

I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

