

The Last Supper

*“As often as ye eat
this bread, and
drink this cup, ye
do shew the Lord’s
death till he come.”*
— *I Corinthians*
11:26

ACCORDING TO THE JEW-ish calendar, the fourteenth day of Nisan this year falls on Sunday, March 28. The day begins at sundown and corresponds with the night before Jesus died. He ate the

Passover with his disciples for the last time and invited them to partake of the ‘bread’ and the ‘cup’ with him, explaining that they represented his broken body and shed blood. This annual anniversary is the only proper time to partake of these Memorial emblems, which follows the scriptural custom. The Lord’s true people continue to renew their vows of consecration to suffer and die with him inspired by his most wonderful promises.

A SOLEMN CEREMONY

The celebration of the Memorial is a short and simple ceremony, but with profound and far reaching significance. “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is

given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”—Luke 22:17-20

WITH HIS DISCIPLES

When Jesus gathered together with his disciples in the upper room, it would be the last meal that he would share with them before he was to give his life for the sin-sick human family. It was the closing hours of his earthly mission, and would end three and a half years of intense ministry whereby he preached the message of Truth to those who came to hear him. As illustrations and a foretaste of his future kingdom, he also healed many of the sick and afflicted, and raised some from the grave. This last supper with his disciples would thus end the commission he had been given by his Heavenly Father to rescue the human family from sin and death. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

As an added and more personal note to his closest followers, the Master taught them, saying, “Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at

my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”—Luke 22:27-30

A CORRESPONDING PRICE

The perfect man Adam had sinned and brought upon himself and his offspring the divine penalty of death. As a corresponding price, the perfect man Christ Jesus gave himself in death as a substitute for Adam, thus providing a way of escape from the death sentence for all mankind—“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:22) John also explained, “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

FAITH IN JESUS' BLOOD

This provision of God's grace is made operative toward the Lord's people during this present Gospel Age, and it rests upon the basis of their faith in Jesus' sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice provided an opportunity for Adam and all his children to be restored to perfection of life as human beings. During the kingdom age this opportunity will be offered to the whole world of mankind. It will also guarantee a resurrection and an awakening from the sleep of death for all those who have died throughout the long centuries of the past.

The imputation of life through faith in Christ's blood makes it possible for his consecrated followers to offer themselves in acceptable sacrifice to God. In his letter to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to

this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

BURIED WITH JESUS

The apostle addressed the true significance of being baptized into Jesus’ death. He said, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:3-11

OUR PARTICIPATION

When we partake of the emblems which represent the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we testify that we not only gratefully accept the provision of life thus made through him, but also that we have entered into a covenant with the Lord.

The psalmist wrote, "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. 50:5) "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24) The Apostle Paul speaks of the special partnership that is thus established by sharing in the cup of sacrifice. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."—I Cor. 10:16,17

A SACRIFICIAL DEATH

Jesus knew from the beginning of his ministry that he was to die sacrificially. "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. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."—John 6:51-56

Even when it became apparent to our Lord's disciples that he would be killed by his enemies, they had great difficulty in accepting this fact and did

not understand the reason why he had to die. This added to the burden he bore during the last trying hours of his life because he had very little benefit of human understanding and comfort. From the scriptural account, we read some of the details that took place during Jesus' final hours.

A LONELY WAY

“Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”—Matt. 26:35-40

WATCH AND PRAY

It would have meant much to Jesus to know that at least one of his followers was ready and willing to share in his feelings with some degree of understanding. Yet he was kind to them, and said, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he

came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”—Matt. 26:41-45

It was no doubt difficult for Jesus to realize that he must stand alone during the final hours of his earthly ministry. He knew that his Father was always near to comfort and strengthen him, but he now had to experience the loneliness of having no human companionship to give him comfort, sympathy, or understanding. He had to face his accusers, be condemned to death and then hung upon a cross to die, all without any human comfort.

HUMBLE SUBMISSION

Through all of this terrible agony, Jesus was calm, patient, and humbly submitting to his Heavenly Father’s will. When asked by the high priest if he was the Son of God, he was forthright in his acknowledgment of this truth, which he knew would seal his final condemnation as far as the religious leaders of Israel were concerned. He simply answered, “Thou hast said.” (vs. 64) Later, when Pilate asked if he were a king, Jesus explained, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world.” (John 18:37) He fully understood the implications of this confession of the Truth and that Pilate could do nothing further to save his life. His accusers would surely press the false charge that he had committed treason against the Roman masters.

JESUS CONDEMNED

From the scriptural account, we read in part some of the events that unfolded in Jesus' final hours. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."—Matt. 27:24-26

As the Master hung upon the cross, the crowds were watching him. "They that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God."—vss. 39-43

THE FINAL SCENE

When the end finally came, Jesus was strengthened with the knowledge of his Father's countenance. In complete faith and confidence, he put his life in the Father's hands. "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father,

into Your hands I commit My spirit.” And “having said this, He breathed His last.”—Luke 23:44-46, *New American Standard Bible*

Truly our Lord Jesus had been led as a lamb to the slaughter. Now his sacrifice for the sin-cursed human creation was finished and the antitypical Passover lamb had been slain. As we partake of the emblems again this year let us remember his broken body and shed blood, and do so with a grateful appreciation of the great love which provided redemption and life for us at so great a cost.

HIS FOLLOWERS

While we can rejoice that Jesus’ personal suffering was completed on Calvary nearly two thousand years ago, the Memorial emblems of which we again partake will remind us that we have not yet completed our sacrifice. This is yet the privilege of his consecrated followers of which the Apostle Paul wrote. “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.”—Col. 1:24

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”—Heb. 12:1-3

OUR GREAT SALVATION

The Memorial season is an appropriate time to reexamine our own position. Are we facing up to our privileges of sacrifice as faithfully as we intended to do when we first entered the narrow way, or are we perhaps taking an easier way? As we think upon Jesus at this Memorial season, we will all want to make sure that we are among those who continue voluntarily to keep our sacrifice on the altar. It is only those who strive against the enemies of the flesh who will be faithful. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."—Mark 13:13

Paul asks, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." (Heb. 2:3) He then reminded them, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." (chap. 10:32,33) James encourages, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."—James 1:12

END OF THE AGE

Those consecrated brethren who have been enlightened by present Truth know that we are now living in the closing years of the present Gospel Age. We do not know how many more years we will have the privilege of partaking of the Memorial

emblems, but we do know that the fruition of all our hopes is near. This should give added meaning to this year's Memorial Supper and cause us to increase our efforts in the weeks and months ahead to make our calling and election sure.

The blessed hope of again being in the actual presence of his Heavenly Father was one of the joys set before Jesus, and enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. When instituting the Memorial Supper, Jesus told his disciples that he would not drink of the cup with them again until they were all together once again in the kingdom. Jesus' faithful followers are promised a place in that glorious future kingdom. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21

PARTAKING OF THE EMBLEMS

Many of the Lord's consecrated people will be gathering together again this year to commemorate our dear Lord's death on Sunday evening, March 28, 2010. However, those who may be isolated from this privilege need not feel deprived from complying with our Lord's request to do this in remembrance of him. Wherever this may be the case it is possible to bring Christ into each individual and consecrated heart with renewed meaning and strengthened determination to be his faithful follower even unto death.

Let each one remember the great and tragic events that were about to take place nearly two thousand years ago when Jesus gathered with his disciples in the upper room a few hours before his

terrible death. Let us also recall our loving Heavenly Father's ultimate plan and purpose for the reconciliation of the poor groaning and sin-sick human family, and that this wonderful purpose will soon be accomplished.

It is recorded, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."—John 3:14-18

Jesus loved the human creation and willingly gave his life that the world might live. May the Memorial Supper this year help to fill our hearts more fully with the desire to comfort all who mourn, and increase our longing for the time when we will soon have the glorious opportunity of association with our Lord in the administration of his righteous kingdom. The time is near for the long-promised work of restoration for all the willing and obedient to health and life, and of establishing peace and righteousness in a very dark world. ■

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matthew 6:10