

In the Upper Room

“When Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”

—John 13:1

JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES

spent the evening before his crucifixion in an “upper room” which had been provided as a place where they could eat the Passover lamb in accordance with the requirements of the Jewish Law. This was on the fourteenth day of the first month of the lunar year, known as Nisan. “As they were eating” the regular Passover supper Jesus took some of the unleavened bread, and some of “the fruit of the vine.” He said to his disciples concerning the bread, “Take, eat; this is my body”; and of the cup, “Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”—Matt. 26:26-29

Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “This do in remembrance of me.” Then Paul adds, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” (I Cor. 11:24-26) It is

clear from these words that Jesus desired that his disciples continue this remembrance, or memorial, of his death from year to year, on the anniversary of his crucifixion. This year that date will be Sunday evening, April 13. On that evening, the brethren and followers of the Master throughout the world will gather for this Memorial Supper.

Jesus was the antitype of the Passover lamb. He was the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The Memorial Supper is not a continuance of the Jewish Passover supper. To believers, the need for continuing the typical Passover celebration ceased when the antitypical Passover Lamb was slain. The Memorial Supper is a remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus, a commemoration of his death.

It is a simple ceremony in which the unleavened bread symbolizes the broken body of the Master, and the cup represents his shed blood. This “fruit of the vine,” as a symbol of Jesus’ shed blood, depicts his death, while the broken unleavened bread reminds us that it was a human life that was sacrificed. Jesus had said that he would give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) When we partake of these emblems at the Memorial Supper we indicate that we gratefully accept the provision of life which our Heavenly Father has made for us through Jesus, our Redeemer.

PARTICIPATION

Paul gave us a further thought. He wrote, “The cup of blessing, for which we bless God,—is it not a participation of the blood of the Anointed one? The loaf which we break,—is it not a participation of

the body of the Anointed one? Because there is one loaf, we, the many, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Cor. 10:16,17, *Emphatic Diaglott*) Paul is saying here that because we all partake, symbolically speaking, of the body and blood of the Anointed one that, therefore, “we, the many,” have the privilege of being counted as “one body” under Jesus as our “head.”

Having partaken of the benefits symbolized by the body and blood of our Lord, we now have the great privilege of sharing with Christ in the “better sacrifices” of this Gospel Age. (Heb. 9:23) It should be remembered that the sacrifices in which we share are not typified by the Passover lamb, for only Jesus was the “Lamb of God” whose sacrifice could take away the “sin of the world” through his death as a corresponding price for father Adam—a “ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:5,6

Rather, the “better sacrifices” in which we share are those of the “sin-offering,” typified by Israel’s offering of a “bullock” and a “goat” on the Day of Atonement. (see Leviticus chapter 16) Thus, when we partake of the “cup” and the “bread” at the Memorial Supper, we are in effect saying that because we have accepted for ourselves the meritorious provisions of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, we also desire to continue being offered as part of the great antitypical sin-offering. The Memorial is a time for each of us, as followers of Christ, to renew our consecration. It is a time to reaffirm our desire to be developed with our Lord as sympathetic high-priests, to continue to be dead with him, and to be rekindled with the hope of living and reigning with him.

Jesus did not die merely for his footstep followers of the present age. His blood was shed and his body broken for the sins of the whole world. (I John 2:2) This means that when we partake of the Memorial emblems, we rejoice in God's love for the entire human race, and for the wonderful provision he has made through Christ for their restoration to life during the Messianic kingdom. It is a reminder that our faith and hope are not narrow and selfish, but broad and loving, in that we envision the ultimate blessing of "all the families of the earth."—Gen. 28:14

UPPER ROOM LESSONS

It is well that throughout the season of the Memorial we especially contemplate the seriousness of being a disciple of Christ. Many of the important facets of discipleship were brought to the attention of the disciples in the upper room that memorable night before our Lord's crucifixion. A record of this is found in chapters 13 through 17 of the Gospel of John. Let us note some of the things which Jesus said and did that night.

After the supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. (chap. 13:1-17) This was designed to be a lesson in humility, and how important it is for every follower of the Master to be humble before the Lord and before one another. This is a severe test upon all of the Lord's people. There often seems to be an urge to be prominent or to do something of great importance in the Lord's service.

Jesus illustrated the spirit of humility by performing a very menial service for his disciples. May we be watchful for opportunities to do little things for

the brethren, even if we are unnoticed and unknown. In due time, the Lord will indicate the greater things to be done, if not on this side of the veil, then in the kingdom when, if faithful, we will be living and reigning with him.

True humility is displayed in action, not merely by words. The brother or sister who is truly humble will not need to tell others about it. Humility consists of doing with our might what our hands find to do, whether along the lines of menial service, or otherwise, without ostentation, without show, and without in any way inviting others to observe our humility.

There is no better way of obtaining a true perspective of genuine humility than through meditation on the greatness of our God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially at the Memorial season. If we are being humbled by the position in which we find ourselves, either in connection with our daily work, or in the congregation of the Lord's people, let us remember Jesus. He was led "as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isa. 53:7) We profess that we want to be like Jesus. Let us rejoice when the Lord gives us an experience which provides the opportunity to develop greater humility.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

It was in the upper room that Jesus said to his disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (John 13:34) This is a heart-searching commandment. These words are well-known by every professed follower of Jesus.

How deeply, though, do they enter into our consciousness, and control our thoughts, words, and deeds?

Jesus loved us to the point that he laid down his life for us, dying the cruel death of the cross. Our keeping of this commandment, and following in his footsteps, are shown by daily using in the service of the brethren our time, strength, and substance which might otherwise be used to advance our own interests in life. Each of us, as a follower of the Master, must answer as to whether we are keeping the full spirit of these words, and the Memorial season is an excellent time for such self-examination.

Our opening Scripture says of Jesus that “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” We are to similarly love one another. Here is described a constant, abiding love—a love which surmounts difficulties of every kind, and patiently continues to sacrifice so that others, particularly our brethren, might be blessed. It is not a love that is warm today, and indifferent, or even cold, tomorrow. It is not a love that glows with enthusiasm when our efforts are appreciated, and becomes a mere dying ember when our service is unnoticed and unpraised.

When we think of the glorious perfection of Jesus, in comparison to the undone, imperfect, nature of his disciples, we realize that it was not a natural thing to love them. Yet, the Master loved them, despite all the things which might well have repelled him and discouraged his love for them. It is in this same way that we, too, are to love the brethren—all of our fellow-disciples.

It is not difficult to love those who love us, and there are special kinships of interests and personalities among the brethren that draw certain ones closely together. It is good that all such love one another, but this alone is not the full measure of obedience to the “new commandment” which will merit an abundant entrance into the kingdom.

There are those amongst the brethren who may seem different, and because of this appear remote to us. Some may even irritate us by their words and ways. We may pride ourselves in our growth in grace, and feel superior to those who have not advanced so fully. We may suppose that those new in the way should be as “good” as we are. If we find that we are thinking along these lines, it would seem to indicate that we are not loving all the brethren as Jesus loved his disciples, and loves us. Here again, the Memorial season is an appropriate time to check our view of the brethren, and how well we are covering their imperfections with the mantle of self-sacrificing love.

THE FATHER’S LOVE

Jesus also said in the upper room, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” Hearing this, one of the disciples asked, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” To this Jesus replied, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—John 14:21-23

From this we learn that the secret of abiding in the Heavenly Father's love, and of having him and our Lord Jesus make their abode with us, is to "keep" his commandments. This should be a sobering truth to every consecrated child of God. There is a danger that the "commandments" and other aspects of the Truth may become just so many words which we learn glibly to express, and use as a basis upon which to philosophize. Indeed, it is important that every phase of the Truth, especially these vitally important commandments of Jesus, become well-fixed in our minds. This alone, however, is not enough.

If we are to realize the full sense of the Father's presence with us, and of his love being shed abroad in our hearts, it is essential that we keep his Word, and do so no matter what the cost might be. It will, in fact, cost us all that we have and are, eventually even our life, to keep the commandments of Jesus. It will cost us to love those who may not be congenial to us, and those who may dislike or even injure us. This, however, is part of what is involved in being disciples of Christ. There is no better time to gain a fresh realization of this than at the Memorial season.

PEACE GIVEN

In the upper room, Jesus also said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) The world attempts to give peace to its citizens through financial security and amicable social arrangements, but how shallow and short-lived such peace often turns out to be. By contrast, how

deep, sweet, and constant is the peace that is born of faith and trust in our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

“My peace I give unto you,” Jesus said. His peace resulted from knowing his Heavenly Father and from the perfect trust he placed in him. “I knew that thou hearest me always,” Jesus said in prayer. (John 11:42) As Jesus was about to be arrested, he said to those who showed willingness to help him, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53) Later he said to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”—John 19:11

Jesus was assured of his Father’s love, and of his ability to care for him. He knew that the mighty power which stilled the storm on Galilee, that healed the sick and raised the dead, could protect, strengthen, and comfort him in every situation that might arise. Thus, he had peace. It was not a peace that was based on outward tranquility, because Jesus’ life was often far from tranquil. His enemies were almost continuously sniping at him. Finally, they arrested and crucified him. However, through it all Jesus enjoyed that peace of mind and heart which the world can neither give nor take away.

Jesus bequeathed this same peace to us. It is critical that we not fail to meet the conditions upon which this peace may become ours. The requirements for possessing and enjoying this peace are the same for us as they were for Jesus. These were confidence in God’s love and care, and a complete resignation to his Father’s will. Without these Jesus could not have enjoyed peace.

It is the same with us. We must have the assurance of the Father's love, and of his ability to supply all our needs. We are to so fully accept his will that we are not disturbed by the trials which he permits to come upon us. These are very important keys to enjoying that perfect peace which may be ours as disciples of Christ. Indeed, partaking of the Memorial emblems denotes that we have surrendered our wills, our all, to the Heavenly Father, even as Jesus did.

We are to avoid being fretful and anxious over those things of life which we do not like, and cannot change. We should not have anxious worry about the outcome of various situations which may confront us. We must not feel rebellious over the lot in life in which we find ourselves. We are not to be envious of those who seemingly enjoy so many more blessings at the hand of the Lord than we do. To have difficulty in any or all of these attitudes might well indicate a lack of complete resignation to the Lord's will.

The peace of God and of Christ is ours to enjoy if we but meet the conditions. No "Gethsemane" experience can rob us of that peace if we keep in mind that our Heavenly Father knows our needs, and that he gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him. Let us remember the admonition, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."—John 14:27

JESUS' PRAYER

Before leaving the upper room that night, Jesus approached his Heavenly Father in prayer, recorded in John, chapter 17. To a large extent this prayer

was on behalf of his apostles and on behalf of those who would believe on him “through their word.” (John 17:20) This includes us. Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (vs. 17) We can participate in the answer to this prayer only if we apply ourselves to the study of God’s Word, and yield our lives to its hallowed influence.

“As thou hast sent me into the world,” Jesus continued, “even so have I also sent them into the world.” (vs. 18) This is a reminder of the divine commission we have received to be ambassadors for Christ. This is closely associated with the significance of the Memorial emblems, which symbolize the suffering and death of our Redeemer. Jesus was crucified because of his faithfulness in the ministry of the Truth.

We rejoice in the fact that Jesus was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) However, it was not for his patience, mercy, and love that he was hated and put to death. It was because he exposed popular error, and proclaimed unpopular truth. The darkness of his day hated the light, so the servants of darkness put the Light-bearer to death. If we truly desire to follow in his footsteps—to suffer with him—we must be faithful as his ambassadors in proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus also prayed that his disciples might be one, even as he and his Father were one. (John 17:21) The answer to this prayer in our own experience will be in proportion to our acceptance of the Heavenly Father’s will and way in our lives. Our unity of the Spirit as the Lord’s disciples does not come from agreements we may make with one another,

but from the wholehearted agreement of each of us to do the Father's will, and by faithfulness in living up to the terms of our covenant. This was the basis of Jesus' oneness with the Father.

How sweet is the Master's request, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (vs. 24) Verse 26 continues, "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." How true it was that Jesus loved his own unto the end, and wanted for them the most valued treasure in the universe—the intimate love of his Heavenly Father.

Jesus knew that this request for his disciples to be with him was in keeping with his Father's will, for in the upper room that night he had said to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) What a blessed prospect! The contemplation of this great future joy will do much to help us, as it did Jesus, to endure the cross and despise the shame, as we continue to suffer and die with him—Ps. 16:11; Heb. 12:2,3

TO GETHSEMANE AND CALVARY

From the upper room that night, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he offered that memorable prayer of resignation to

his Father, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39) Judas, who had left the upper room before the others, later went to Gethsemane also, not to watch with the Master, but to betray him with a kiss. From the garden, Jesus was taken before the high priest, and later tried before Pilate.

The result of these hearings was inevitable, but the Lamb of God opened not his mouth in self-defense. A crown of thorns was placed upon his head. He was beaten and spat upon. He was hung on a cross, held there by nails which cruelly pierced his hands and his feet. As night approached, his side was pierced to make certain of his death.

In fulfillment of prophecy, Jesus sensed momentarily the loss of his Father's smile, and cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then, in confidence, he said, "It is finished." Finally, uttering his final words of complete resignation and trust even unto death, he said to his Father, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit"—my life. In these few words is summed up the vital meaning of the Memorial Supper for us.—Matt. 27:46; John 19:30; Luke 23:46

When we made our consecration to do the Father's will, it meant that we were committing our lives to him, to do with them as he wished. Is that commitment still valid? Are we day by day, and in every experience of life, fully desirous of doing the Father's will? This is one of the important practical lessons in partaking of the "bread" and the "cup." It is only as day by day we commit our lives unreservedly to the Lord that we will be ready at the end of the way to say to him from the heart, as Jesus did, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Thus, as

Paul said, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”—I Cor. 11:28

The month of Nisan in which the Jewish Passover was kept, was referred to by God as the “beginning of months” for the Israelites. May the Memorial Supper this year be the beginning of a blessed new year in the Lord for all his truly consecrated people. May it be a year of renewed energy in the service of our Heavenly Father, the Truth, and the brethren. Through all the days to come, being emptied of self, may the love of God in ever richer measure continue to be “shed abroad in our hearts.”—Rom. 5:5 ■

“The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. And Jesus said, . . . I am the bread of life.”
—John 6:33,35