

OUR LORD'S MEMORIAL



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Our Lord's Memorial

About 3,600 years ago Israel was instructed to take the blood of the Passover lamb, and to place it on the doorposts of their houses—then to go inside and abide there for the remainder of the night. They may have spent fifteen minutes to an hour at the most to comply with these instructions.

This happened to us, too, when we accepted Jesus as our personal redeemer and applied the blood on the doorposts of our hearts. This was the beginning of our journey.

THE NIGHT OF THE PASSOVER

That night, after the Passover Lamb was slain, and the blood applied on the doorposts of their houses, Israel went inside their homes and closed the door. They were now to partake of the Passover lamb after it was roasted, and all were united as a family in this undertaking. They were illustrating how the brethren in this nighttime of the Gospel Age are drawn together by the Lamb of God, and while under the blood partake of

the lamb, appropriating to themselves the merit of his sacrifice. We are reminded of the 133rd Psalm, that says: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (vs. 1) Israel, in their families, was assembled that night in holy, happy, peaceful fellowship.

The most important part of this ceremony was the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts of the houses. It pictured being saved by the blood, which is the foundation for all Christian life. Jesus, "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Pet. 2:24), is that Paschal Lamb whose blood was shed to redeem us. (I Pet. 1:19) Jesus was made "to be sin [a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Cor. 5:21) While Jesus was on earth he was especially attentive to the afflicted, the poor, the blind, the halt, the maimed, and the lepers. All mankind are recipients of the ransom benefits regardless of their station in life. The blood of the lamb makes possible our connection to God and to one another. He is the center of unity.

THE NEED FOR ASSEMBLING

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:30) We are

assembled by the Holy Spirit, and Christ is the reason for our meeting. Such gatherings are characterized by holiness. The Holy Spirit can only gather us to Christ. It cannot assemble to a name, an ordinance, a system, or an association, but only to the glorified Christ in heaven. It is a 'little flock' that is being gathered. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words." (John 14:23) The proof of our love for Jesus and for God is in doing those things he commands us to do in his word. Those who give themselves to God and to follow after Christ should not still want to do their own will, which interferes in the work that God is doing in us.

On the original Passover night when all the families of Israel were assembled in their homes, they gathered around a roasted lamb—a lamb that had undergone the action of fire. The instructions in Exodus 12:8,9 are very explicit: "They shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof."

The roasted lamb illustrates how Jesus, the true Passover Lamb, submitted himself to the action of fire—'fiery trials'—for the three and one-half years of his ministry.

This was such an important part of the illustration that Israel was told not to eat of it raw or sodden with water.

REMOVAL OF LEAVEN

The instructions for eating the Passover lamb apply to our partaking of the antitypical Passover Lamb too. The Israelites were to eat it with unleavened bread. Leaven is a symbol of evil and sin. Never is it used in God's Word to symbolize that which is pure, holy or good. The feast that Israel was to keep in conjunction with the Passover was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As Exodus 12:15 instructed Israel: "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses."

This was intended to illustrate Israel's separation from sin. We are told by the Apostle Paul, "Purge out therefore the old leaven." (I Cor. 5:7) Paul does not say, 'Try to purge out the old leaven'. Rather, he is positive about it and says, 'Do it'. Our flesh may interfere with such a program. This was recognized by the apostle when he wrote, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil

is present with me.” (Rom.7:19-21) However, we must put forth every effort to remove sin and evil.

Israel was to do this for seven days. Seven represents completeness. The Christian is to put away evil and live in holiness. God cannot tolerate evil in thought, word, or deed. As the Apostle John reminds us, speaking of God, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” (I John 1:6) Later he said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (vs. 8) The flesh continues to assert itself, but by God’s assisting grace we can keep it subdued. John continues, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (vs. 9)

Many times we are caught off guard and may say or do something that is wrong. On such occasions we must seek our Advocate immediately, even as reminded by John: “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (I John 2:1) The new mind that is being developed is seeking perfection. Yet the individual Christian cannot be perfect until he or she receives a perfect new body. As John says, “We know that whosoever is born

[begotten] of God sinneth not.” (I John 5:18) John is telling us that those who have been begotten of God do not sin willfully. They have no sympathy with sin. They purge out the old leaven.

EATING THE PASSOVER LAMB

The Israelites were not saved by eating unleavened bread, but by the blood of the Passover Lamb. So also, the Christian is not saved by practical holiness, but by the blood of Jesus. However, anyone who continues in evil and sin, by practice or by principle, will not have true communion with Jesus, and will not enjoy his salvation. Those who receive the benefits of the ransom and belong to God's assembly must be holy, but they should recognize that their salvation is by grace, and not by their holiness.

THE BITTER HERBS

The Paschal Lamb was to be eaten with bitter herbs. These represent the bitter experiences of the LORD's people, which are related to the experiences of Jesus as represented in the roasted lamb. “If we suffer [with him], we shall also reign with him.” (II Tim. 2:12) “We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) It was prophesied of Jesus: “He was wounded

for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:5), and not by our holiness.

The Apostle Paul, in speaking of the Tabernacle sacrifices, tells us: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." (Heb. 13:12,13) We must eat of the roasted lamb with bitter herbs.

With God's help we are able to crucify our flesh. (Gal. 5:24) Like the Apostle Paul we are trying to keep our bodies under. (I Cor. 9:27) This we must do to be able to hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." (Matt. 24:21)

As Israel fed upon the lamb, they were prepared for a journey. They were ready to leave Egypt. Never again would they associate with the Egyptians. They were to eat in haste, with staff in hand. All this pictured how our life is to be characterized by our future destiny as joint-heirs with Christ in his future kingdom. The staff pictured our dependence, our leaning on God for the journey. All of this was made possible by the blood of the lamb. As God has brought us together in unity through Christ, so also he

will guide us in our journey to the Promised Land, the heavenly Canaan.

“IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME”

It is the custom of the world to commemorate the birthdays of its heroes and great ones, while the time and circumstances of their death are, as a rule, measurably forgotten. Probably the main reason for this is that the accomplishments which make them great are limited to the time when they are alive, while death brings their careers to an end. But with Jesus this order of things is reversed. True, his birth is favorably remembered each year by millions, but his specific directions were that his followers were to commemorate his death. He left no instructions concerning the celebration of his birth.

Naturally it was essential that Jesus be born into the world as a human being in order to be the Redeemer of the fallen race, but it was his death that provided redemption. The main objective of the Master's First Advent was accomplished by his death. His life was inspiring; his teachings far-reaching in their effects upon human behavior; his miracles a blessed boon to those who benefited from them; his prophecies furnished an accurate preview of many of the outstanding

events of the age; but his mission to earth would have been largely in vain but for the fact of his death. The accomplishments of all other men have been cut short by death, but the Master's service expanded into its greatest effectiveness through death.

This doubtless is the reason why it is God's will for his people to commemorate the death of Jesus. It is vitally important, that we keep ever before us the necessity of Jesus' death, and the fact that only by reason thereof are we privileged now to enjoy the hope of life through him. It is important that we, as the followers of the Master, remember his death, because the Scriptures invite us to die with him. As with Jesus so with Christians, their ministry is victoriously consummated only when they have completed their work of sacrifice faithfully, even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

MOMENTOUS DAYS

The last few days of Jesus' earthly life were momentous ones. While he understood the meaning of events as they followed one another in quick succession, his disciples were in large measure unable to comprehend their meaning. Israel as a whole was utterly blind to the fact that the most important history of all the ages was then being made

in Judea. It was during those dramatic days that Jesus rode through the gates of the city of Jerusalem, presenting himself to Israel as their foretold King and Messiah.

Following that, he drove out the money-changers from the Temple. His disciples interviewed him on the Mount of Olives, inquiring concerning the signs of his Second "Presence (*parousia*), and the consummation of the age." (Matt. 24:2,3, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) He celebrated the Pass-over supper with his disciples in the upper room. Judas bargained to betray him into the wicked hands of his enemies. There was that agonizing scene in the Garden of Gethsemane; the betrayal that followed; the trial before the high priest; Peter's denial; the trial before Pilate and Herod; the scourging; mocking; and finally the crucifixion. These were the events that marked the closing days of humanity's most noble benefactor. To the disciples they spelled, first, high hope, then bewilderment, and finally bitter disappointment. To many of the Jews these events were but the natural consequences of the misguided efforts of a false pretender who tried to get himself accepted as the promised Messiah of Israel, and who was properly dealt with by the 'legitimate' rulers of his day. Jesus alone understood what was occurring, and his

knowledge contributed to his ability to bear up under the trial and to finish the work his Heavenly Father had given him to do.

THE MASTER DESPISED

Jesus had never been popular with the scribes and Pharisees. Individuals among them had been impressed with his demeanor and teachings, but as a group they had been antagonistic toward him from the beginning of his unselfish ministry, and never lost an opportunity to do what they could to prejudice the people against him. But the people did some thinking for themselves. They liked the gracious words which the Master spoke, and agreed that “never man spake like this man.”—John 7:46

Even more convincing to the general Jewish public were the many miracles which the Master performed. These benefactions created a process of reasoning reflected by the words of the blind man who had been healed. He intimated that he did not understand everything involved in the great blessings he had received, but he did know that whereas once he was blind, now he could see. (John 9:25) Many others had been blind, and now they too could see. Besides, there were lepers who had been cleansed; cripples who had been made

to walk; maniacs who had been freed from evil spirits; and dead who had been raised to life again.

Perhaps very few of these were able to grasp a great deal of what the Master taught, but they did know that he had blessed them, and their relatives and friends knew it. Hence, quite a considerable number in Israel were favorably disposed toward Jesus, and would not be too easily influenced by the scribes and Pharisees to join in an effort to take his life. Above all, he was overshadowed by the providential care of his Heavenly Father, which prevented his enemies from accomplishing their evil designs against him until it was the "due time" for his sacrifice to be consummated.—I Tim. 2:6

DISCIPLES CONVINCED

Meanwhile, as Jesus went about doing good and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, his disciples became more and more convinced of his messiahship. When he first called them to follow him and to become 'fishers of men', they believed him to be the Messiah of promise. But as they witnessed his miracles, listened as he discoursed to the people, and sat at his feet imbibing more fully the spirit and depth of his gracious words, their confidence must have been crystallized.

It was no wonder that Peter expressed his willingness to die for his Master.

But the disciples were natural men, not yet begotten of the Holy Spirit; hence they were unprepared for the manner in which the ministry of their Messiah, their Lord, was to be so suddenly concluded. Even the suggestion from Jesus that might have at least warned them to some extent of what to expect, brought forth that vigorous protest from Peter, "Be it far from thee, Lord." (Matt. 16:22) Jesus' reply to Peter on this occasion contained a depth of meaning, which can only be grasped and appreciated by the Spirit-begotten. He said, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."—Matt. 16:25

How strange this must have sounded to the disciples! It still sounds strange to those who have not been initiated by the Holy Spirit into the secrets of the Heavenly Father's plan of salvation. How could anyone possibly save his life by losing it? Jesus did by losing, or giving up, his earthly life in sacrifice. In the resurrection he was rewarded with divine life. His sacrifice was a voluntary one, but once having entered voluntarily into this covenant of sacrifice, his withdrawal would have meant eternal death. Thus he saved his

life by faithfully completing his sacrifice even unto death.

By losing his life in sacrifice, Jesus also provided an opportunity of salvation for all of Adam's race. No wonder that a feature of the Divine Plan so outstandingly important as this, and so different from the course of fallen human wisdom, should be commemorated by God's people! The practical and inspirational aspects of the Master's death are in themselves sufficient grounds for commemorating the event. In this respect his death was a practical outworking of the principle of Divine love, an illustration of what love should and will do in our lives if, like Jesus, we are governed by it. If we are to be like him we must also lay down our lives—motivated by the same love which prompted him to lose his life for others. However, we should never lose sight of the more important substitutional aspect of the Master's death as man's Redeemer.

ACCLAIMED AS KING

Later, after the Holy Spirit had come upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost, they understood these things which they were utterly unable to grasp prior thereto. But even though they did not understand everything the Master told them, they continued to follow him. Obeying his

instructions by contacting one of his friends, they secured a young ass, and on it Jesus rode triumphantly into the city of Jerusalem as Israel's King.

The disciples believed Jesus to be Israel's King, and they would expect that at some appropriate time such a presentation of himself would certainly be necessary. The question raised in their minds by their Master's talk of death would now, temporarily at least, be forgotten. Here was the way things ought to be. Jesus was a King, and it was time the people knew it and had the opportunity to acclaim him as such. Now he was giving them this opportunity and they were rising to the occasion. The disciples must have thought that surely the Messianic kingdom was now at hand!

Then Jesus went to the Temple, healed the sick whom he found there, and drove out the moneychangers. This harmonized well with his kingly entry into the city. The disciples' spirits mounted still higher. They manifested their enthusiasm by calling Jesus' attention to the beautiful stones with which the Temple had been built. They may have had visions of Israel's new ruler soon taking over the magnificent edifice. But their enthusiasm was quickly dampened by Jesus, who remarked that the time would come when not one stone

would be left upon another in that glorious Temple.—Matt. 24:2

What a shock this must have been! Evidently, however, it caused the disciples to realize that there was much yet which they needed to learn concerning their Messiah and the plans for the Messianic kingdom, for later we find them with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, where they are questioning him concerning the time and evidences of his Second Presence and the establishment of his kingdom.

They had no clear picture of what their questions really implied, but to a degree at least they had sensed from Jesus' remarks that the kingdom was not as near as they had supposed. They may now have remembered other things he previously had said, such as the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and then returned. In any event, they wanted to know more about that of which they realized they knew so little.

So they said to Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek, *parousia*—'presence'] and of the end of the world [Greek, *aion*—'age']? (Matt. 24:3) From these questions it is obvious that the disciples sensed, at least vaguely,

that Jesus might be separated from them for a while, and would return later to establish his kingdom.

The Master's lengthy reply to their query is a marvelous prophecy, not only concerning the end of the age, but also of general conditions throughout the age, beginning with the downfall of the Jewish polity. But, there is no reason to suppose that it enlightened the disciples and prepared them for the events which were immediately before them and before their Master. It was not that they did not want to know, or did not try to learn. It was simply a case of the natural man not being able to understand the things of the Spirit of God.—I Cor. 2:10-14

THE UPPER ROOM

The minds of the disciples were by now greatly unsettled. As they assembled in the upper room that had been prepared in advance for their use in partaking of the Passover, it was as though the very air had been impregnated with a sense of impending tragedy. Jesus let it be known that one of the number was plotting to betray him. Then came that pleadingly pitiful inquiry, "Master, is it I?" (Matt. 26:25) The noble dignity of the Master is seen in this connection. He knew, of course, that Judas was the traitor, yet he

did not tirade against him, but instead addressed him still as "friend" [*Greek*, 'comrade'; *Diaglott*, 'companion'].—vs. 50

The disciples had much to learn concerning the true spirit and outlook of the Master. Their viewpoint was wholly human, and largely one of self-interest. They delighted to think of the glory which would be theirs when associated with Jesus in his kingdom. They were thinking of this in that upper room, and were contentious with each other as to who would be the greatest. This afforded Jesus a further opportunity to exemplify his humility as well as his great passion for service. He washed their feet and explained that he who would be greatest among them would be servant of all.

Then there was that strange question concerning the possession of swords. Jesus wanted to know how many his disciples possessed. Being assured that there were two swords in the company, Jesus explained that these were sufficient. (Luke 22:38) Perhaps this question was not so strange to Jesus' disciples at that time as it might be to us now. We have learned to think of him as the Prince of peace, and a pacifist. And, indeed he was that, for it developed later that he would not permit those swords to be used in his defense.

Why, then, should he have inquired of his disciples concerning the possession of swords? We now know that he was planning a demonstration of his nonresistance to arrest. Peter possessed one of the two swords and later tried to use it in an effort to prevent his Master's arrest. This gave Jesus a wonderful opportunity to prove that he was voluntarily giving himself up to be crucified. Not only that, but by healing the ear of the High Priest's servant, which Peter had slashed by the ill-advised use of his sword, Jesus demonstrated that he did not wish anyone to suffer on his account even though he was about to suffer and die for all mankind.

THE BREAD AND THE CUP

Jesus and his disciples were in the upper room to eat the Passover supper on the fourteenth day of Israel's' first month, Nisan. It was a yearly memorial of that eventful night in Egypt when the blood of the first Passover lamb was sprinkled upon the lintels and doorposts of the houses, and when the Israelites ate the Passover in safety, while the first-born of Egypt died. —Exod. 12:1-14

God wanted his people to remember the great deliverance that was wrought in connection with that first Passover, so he

commanded the Israelites to commemorate it each year. But even more important than its object lesson to Israel, that typical Passover lamb pointed forward to the far more important sacrifice of the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) who would take away the sin of the world. Jesus was that Lamb, and with his disciples commemorated for the last time the sacrifice of the typical Passover lamb of which he was to be the reality.

It was at the conclusion of this last typical feast of the Passover that Jesus instituted a new ceremonial for his followers. He explained that the bread represented his broken body and that the wine pictured his shed blood. Then he asked his disciples to partake of them with the explanation that as long as they continued to do so they would show forth his death. It was a simple service which the Master thus instituted—merely a communal drinking of the wine, and a breaking and eating together of unleavened bread. It was not intended as a continuation of the Passover supper in a new form; but a memorial of the sacrifice of the real Passover Lamb, even Jesus, the Savior of the world.

It is doubtful if the disciples at that time understood very much of what Jesus said to them concerning the bread and the wine. They did not then realize that it was

necessary for Jesus to die in order that they might have life and enjoy the privilege of reigning with him. They did not understand that his kingdom would come far short of providing the blessings promised by God unless a way was found of annulling the death sentence, which was sending all mankind into the tomb.

They were even more ignorant of the fact that if they were to live and reign with Christ it would be necessary for them to suffer and die with him. The bread and wine, however, represented a further privilege of all Christ's true followers. We receive the blessings of life provided by his broken body and shed blood, and we are also privileged to share in his suffering and death. What a blessed communion, or participation.—I Cor. 10:16,17

THEY SANG A HYMN AND WENT OUT

The account indicates that after Jesus instituted the memorial of his death they immediately left the upper room and made their way to Gethsemane. The Master's heart was too full and the disciples were too tired to remain for further discussion. There was some conversation as they walked slowly out of the city to the Garden. It was then that Peter affirmed his willingness to die for his

Master, and said that he would do this even though all others should forsake him. And Peter meant this with his whole heart as he demonstrated later in his life.

Entering the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus invited Peter, James and John to come apart and watch with him. He thought that these might be disposed to pray with him, but they could not. He went further into retreat to pray. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," was his plea to the Father, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39) We are not to suppose that Jesus even for a moment entertained a desire to violate his covenant of sacrifice. He knew it was the Father's will for him to die, and he was determined to carry out that will.

Perhaps the Master did not realize fully until now that his death was to be brought about in such an ignominious manner, that he was to be charged with blasphemy and treason. For one who had done naught but good; who had honored his Heavenly Father in his every thought, word and deed, these were heartbreaking charges. He was glad to die as the world's Redeemer, but was it the Father's will that he also suffer in these other ways? It was, and, assured of it, Jesus was calm and content.

We are told that Jesus was concerned and was heard for his devotion. (Heb. 5:7, WED) We are not to suppose that he feared dying. But it should be remembered that the Master had hazarded his very existence when he entered into the covenant of sacrifice with his Father. (Ps. 50:5) If he had not been faithful, there would be no resurrection for him. It was, therefore, eternal death which he feared, and it was concerning this, no doubt, that he was comforted, being assured that his Father was still "well pleased" with him. (Matt. 3:17; John 12:27,32) Blessed with this assurance, Jesus thereafter was resigned to all the ignominy and shame that was so undeservedly heaped upon him.

So far as human aid was concerned, the Master had but little during the last hours of his earthly life. This was not because his disciples were unsympathetic. Peter, James and John seemed to be closest to him, and Peter certainly proved his willingness to help. But these natural-minded men were utterly unable to enter into and understand the trial through which their Master was passing. However, where the arm of flesh failed, the Heavenly Father sustained and gave comfort. So confident did Jesus feel that his Father was ever

near and ready to help that he said to Peter that if he so desired he could ask Him for the protection of twelve legions of angels and the request would be granted. —Matt. 26:53

THE SON OF GOD

Leaving Gethsemane, Jesus and the disciples met the mob which had come out from the city to arrest him, who was destined to be King of kings. The Master gave himself up voluntarily, telling the leaders of the mob that he was the one whom they were seeking. There was the betraying kiss of Judas, the brave though ill-advised effort of Peter to rescue his Master from his enemies, and then he was hurried off to the judgment hall to be questioned by the High Priest.

The High Priest, Caiaphas, inquired of Jesus, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Matt. 26:57,63; Mark 14:61) Jesus replied, "Thou hast said" (Matt. 26:64), knowing that this answer in the eyes of the High Priest would make him subject to the death penalty. Right from the beginning of his ministry, the Master was challenged on the issue of his being the Son of God. Satan said to him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down" from the pinnacle of the Temple. (Matt. 4:5,6)

Jesus knew that he was the Son of God. To him there was no 'if' to be removed by any such spectacular demonstration as Satan suggested. When he was baptized he was given the assurance of his Sonship when the voice of God was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—Matt. 3:17

Shortly before the High Priest raised this question again on that eventful last night of the Master's earthly ministry, he had received a similar assurance of his Sonship. This was on the Mount of Transfiguration when there came again those heart-cheering words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matt. 17:5) The Heavenly Father has wonderful means of preparing his people for trials, and what fortitude this fresh assurance must have given Jesus when he was before that jealous and prejudiced High Priest who asked whether he was the Son of God. In Jesus' mind there was no doubt about his Sonship, and, knowing what the result would be, he affirmed the truth. It is not easy to stand firm for the truth when it means death to do so; but Jesus did, and in this he left us an example that we should walk in his steps.

JESUS THE KING

Finally, the Master was brought before Pilate. As representative of Caesar, Pilate was not interested in the religious charges that the Jews had made against Jesus. They very well knew this, so to him they charged that the Master claimed to be a king. If this were true, it would mean to Pilate that Jesus was a potential rival of Caesar, and for that reason would have to be put to death.

Religious prejudice blinds people to the truth, and hinders them from making a proper appraisal of the virtues and sins of others. Pilate had no religious prejudice against the Master; hence upon examination discovered that the charges brought against him had no foundation in fact. As he viewed the matter, even if Jesus did claim to be a king, it was merely a religious concept which did not in any real sense constitute him a contender for the Roman throne. Pilate therefore desired to free the Master; but the angry, prejudice-blinded mob would not permit him to do so.

Jesus had acknowledged to Pilate that the Jews were right in saying that he was a king, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world," was his reply to Rome's representative, when the

question was put to him. (John 18:37) And what a king! He had three and one-half years to enlist the services of those who might be willing to fight his battles for him, but he had made no effort to create an army. Jesus had prevented even his faithful servant, Peter, from using a sword in his defense. Instead, this King of kings was voluntarily dying for his future subjects. No wonder that such a death should be commemorated! They crowned this King of love with thorns. They spat upon him and mocked him. They made him carry his own cross, and finally they nailed him upon it to die. Over his head, by the instruction of Pilate, they placed the inscription, "This is the King of the Jews." (Luke 23:38) Pilate wanted the world to know that this outstanding man was dying because the Jews hated him and had rejected him as their King. But from Jesus' standpoint, he was dying as the Savior of the world. To him the circumstances which brought about his death were unimportant.

While he hung upon the cross, those standing nearby shouted, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matt. 27:40) Here was the same challenging 'if' that was flung at the Master more than three years previously by Satan. He had refused then to do anything to prove

to others that he truly was the Son of God, nor did he yield to the temptation to do this now while hanging upon the cross. There was no more reason to do this than there was to allow Peter to use the sword to defend him.

The chief priests and scribes mockingly said among themselves, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." (Mark 15:31; Matt. 27:41,42) Ah, how little did they realize that by the Master's refusal to save himself he was providing salvation for them and for all the families of the earth! This is the great lesson which all who gain eternal life must learn. This is why Jesus wants us to commemorate his death. It is important for us to be thus reminded of the source of our salvation in order that we may remain humble before God, and realize the full measure of our need—the need that is supplied through his death.

In order for Jesus to take the sinner's place fully, it was essential that the Heavenly Father withdraw favor from him for a brief moment. It was then that the Master cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) But when he finally died, it was with full confidence, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," were his final words, and his earthly ministry was finished—completed triumphantly in death.

(Luke 23:46) As followers of the Master and as members of the body of Christ it is our privilege to suffer and die with him. And when we commemorate his death, we also reaffirm our determination to follow faithfully in his footsteps, because the “cup” also represents our suffering, and the “bread” the breaking of our bodies, as we suffer and die with him.—I Cor. 10:16

Many, including professed Christians, do not realize that the suffering of the Christ continues in the daily sacrifices made by his followers, as they are “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom. 6:5) But this has been the manner in which the plan of God has operated during the Gospel Age. Those sufferings continue.

Every year, on the date of the Memorial of our Lord’s death, after sundown, many of the LORD’s people throughout the world will meet together in their respective localities and will remember anew the wondrous gift of God’s love, even Jesus, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8) At the same time they will rededicate their own lives to follow more faithfully in the Redeemer’s footsteps, rejoicing in the privilege of suffering and dying with him, in order that they may live and reign with him.—Rom. 6:5,8; 8:17

THEIR DELIVERANCE AND OURS

There were no radio or television stations to broadcast the news, and no newspapers to headline the tragic fact of what was taking place that evening of the fourteenth of Nisan more than a millennium and a half before the First Advent of Christ—that fateful night in Egypt when the firstborn of every Egyptian family died. Nor is it likely that the dissemination of such news would have been of any particular value, for every family in the land was so preoccupied with its own sorrow that it is doubtful if very much consideration would have been given to the plight of others. The death angel was no respecter of persons, for the firstborn of the king as well as of the most humble Egyptian in the land was struck down that night of the 14th of Nisan so many centuries ago.

It is an old story, but its meaning to the people of God becomes more vital with every passing year. (Exod. 12:1-14) It is not so much the fact that the firstborn of Egypt died that concerns us, but that the firstborn of Israel were saved from the destroying hand that passed through the land that fateful night. To them, it was a night of deliverance—the deliverance of

the firstborn from death, and the deliverance of all Israel from Egyptian bondage the next day.

And so it is that on the fourteenth of Nisan, as done every year since, thousands of the LORD's people throughout the earth will recall in a very special way their hope of deliverance as the antitypical "church of the firstborn" (Heb.12:23), and will rejoice in their prospect for the deliverance of the world of mankind from slavery to sin and death beginning early in the morning of that glorious new day of the LORD.

THE PASCHAL LAMB

This is the background of thought that helps to emphasize the meaning of the Lord's Memorial Supper to those who are rejoicing in present truth. We all remember the thrilling story of how the firstborn of Israel were saved on that original Passover night. It was because they had obeyed the instructions of the LORD, given to them through Moses—instructions which called for the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb. Each family of the Hebrews had to demonstrate its faith in the saving power of that blood by applying it to the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Any family that failed to do this suffered together with the Egyptians.

We know now, of course, that there was no inherent saving power in the blood of that typical Passover lamb, but rather that the LORD was merely providing an illustration of the wondrous provision for salvation through the gift of his beloved Son. With this thought in mind, how stirring are the words of John the Baptist concerning Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) The sting of death began to blight the human race in the Garden of Eden, and the only way this blight could be removed was through the shedding of blood—not the blood of a lamb, neither of bulls and goats, but the precious blood of Jesus, the one who became the perfect substitute for the forfeited life of father Adam.—Heb. 9:11,12

OUR LORD'S MEMORIAL

For more than three years following John's identification of him as the "Lamb of God," Jesus had labored and served as he laid down his life for the people. And now the time had come when his sacrifice was to be consummated, when he was to be slain as the antitypical Passover Lamb, a sacrifice that was necessary to provide deliverance for both the church and the world. Soon the night before he was actually slain he arranged to meet with his

disciples in an "upper room," there to partake with them, for the last time, of the annual feast which commemorated the circumstances of that original Passover night in Egypt.—Matt. 26:17-30

Finished with this, Jesus took some bread and some wine and instituted a new ordinance—one of only two that are enjoined upon his followers, the other being water immersion, but both of them merely symbols. He gave the bread to his disciples and invited them to partake of it, explaining that it represented his body and the fact that it would be broken for them. Likewise the wine, explaining that it represented his blood, and that his blood was to be shed for them.

This was not intended to be a new form of the Passover. So far as Jesus and his followers were concerned, the yearly commemoration of the Passover came to an end that night. It was merely a type which pointed to Jesus and to the shedding of his blood, and now that he had come and was about to be slain for the sins of the world, there would be no point in continuing the Passover ceremony. What Jesus enjoined upon his disciples was intended as a commemoration of his death, and for the purpose of keeping before his followers what it meant to

them, and the share they were to have with him as the 'church of the firstborn'.

When we think of Jesus' shed blood and his broken body, as represented by the "bread" and the "cup" (Matt. 26:26-28), it helps us to realize the blessed fact that he gave his life for us—that he poured out his soul unto death. How thankful we should be for this! Indeed, one thought we should endeavor to have in mind at the Memorial Supper, and at all times, is that of thankfulness—thankfulness for God's love in giving his Son to die for us, and thankfulness for Jesus' faithfulness in laying down his life as our Redeemer.

The only way to show our appreciation for any gift is to accept and use it; and this we should do with God's gift. We should accept Jesus, and use the merit of his sacrificed life as intended in the Divine plan. The full acceptance of Jesus, as represented in partaking of the Memorial emblems, implies the complete surrender of our wills to do his will, the acceptance of him as our Head. Then we learn that his will for us is that we lay down our lives in sacrifice, just as he did.

COMMUNION

In keeping with this thought, the Apostle Paul explains that our partaking of the

bread and the cup represents a common participation, a communion, in the sacrificial work of Christ—that we are partners with him in suffering and dying. It is a sobering thought, yet one which should inspire us to great diligence in serving the Lord, for it is upon the basis of suffering and dying with the Master that we will have the privilege of living and reigning with him.—Rom. 8:17,18

When we partake of the Memorial emblems this year let us keep these thoughts in mind. Let us think of the great deliverance it represents for us and for the world of mankind, as foreshadowed by the type in Egypt. Let us rejoice in the protection the ‘blood’ affords us as members of the antitypical firstborn class, and of the share we will have with Jesus in delivering all mankind from sin and death in that great day that follows the antitypical Passover night—the Gospel Age. What a blessed prospect!

As we think of the suffering through which Jesus passed in order to purchase this deliverance—the great contradiction of sinners that was heaped upon him, the mocking, the scourging, the cruelty of the cross—may our hearts respond with a more resolute determination to be faithful to him no matter what the cost may

be. It is necessary to set our faces, as the Scriptures declare, "like a flint" (Isa. 50:7), to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice and suffering even unto death, knowing that the LORD will help us in our every time of need.

All of us should live each day as though it were the last. If we do this, we will endeavor, as the saints of God, to fulfill our consecration vows, sacrificing the flesh and its interests, setting our affections on things above.

May the Memorial Supper every year find us nearer to the Lord than ever before, and more appreciative of all that his blood means to us, and will yet mean to all mankind.