

Remembering Christ's Death

“As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death.”

—I Corinthians 11:26

ON FRIDAY EVENING, March 26, groups of the Lord's people throughout the world will join in partaking of the “bread” and

the “cup” which memorialize the death of Jesus, as explained by the Apostle Paul in our opening text. Jesus died as the greater, or antitypical, Passover Lamb, the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Appropriately, his sacrifice was consummated on the anniversary of the slaying of the original Passover lamb, which occurred the night before the exodus of the Israelites from the land of Egypt. This was on the fourteenth day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish nation's religious year.—Exod. 12:1-6

According to the Jewish calendar the fourteenth day of Nisan this year begins at sundown on March 26. This corresponds to the night before Jesus died, when he gathered together with his disciples in the upper room. While seated with them, Jesus asked his disciples to partake of the bread and the cup,

explaining that these represented his body and his shed blood, emblematic of his approaching death. We believe that this yearly anniversary is the proper time for the Lord's people to partake of these Memorial emblems. Thus, again this year, they will keep this scriptural instruction, as they once more remember Jesus in this special way. In doing so, the footstep followers of Christ will also renew their own vows of consecration, inspired by his promise that if they are faithful even unto death they will share with him in his kingdom glory.—Luke 22:29,30; Rev. 2:10; 3:21

The Memorial is a simple ceremony in which those participating confess their belief in the atoning work of Christ Jesus by partaking of the bread and the cup. Paul wrote that Jesus gave himself as a “ransom,” or corresponding price, for all. (I Tim. 2:3-6) It was the perfect man, Adam, who sinned and brought upon himself and his offspring the penalty of death. The perfect man, Jesus, gave himself in death as a substitute, thus providing a way of escape from death for all mankind. He is a “propitiation,” or satisfaction, for “our sins”—that is, the sins of his followers during this age—and “not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

This provision of God's grace is operative toward the Lord's people now upon the basis of faith. The sacrifice of Jesus provided an opportunity for Adam and all his posterity to be restored to perfection of life as human beings. During the thousand years of Christ's kingdom this opportunity will be extended to all mankind, including those who have died throughout the centuries of the past. This will

necessitate an awakening from the sleep of death.
—Rev. 20:6; John 5:28,29

During the present Gospel Age, however, the merit, or value, of Jesus' sacrifice is merely imputed, or reckoned, to his followers—they are not actually given new life. The imputation of life through Christ is to make it possible for their consecration to do God's will acceptable in his sight. Thus, God can deal with them as with "sons," and guide them through the power of his Holy Spirit as they seek to walk in the footsteps of sacrifice and service which Jesus provided as a perfect example for his followers.—Matt. 16:24; John 12:26; Rom. 8:14-17

When we partake of the emblems which represent the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, we testify that we gratefully accept the provision of life thus made through him. We also appreciate that, as a result of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, we are now each given the great opportunity of being part of a brotherhood which has the blessed privilege of fellowship together as members of Christ's "body." This additional, more personal, significance of the Memorial emblems, is mentioned by Paul. "The cup of blessing, which we bless, does it not mean a joint-participation [Greek: fellowship] in the blood of Christ? The loaf of bread which we break, does it not mean a joint-participation [fellowship] in the body of Christ? Since there is one loaf, we who are many are one body; we, all of us, share in that one loaf."—I Cor. 10:16,17, *Weymouth New Testament*

CHRIST'S FAITHFULNESS

It is especially appropriate in partaking of the Memorial emblems, and in our preparation for this

holy occasion, to recall at what great cost redemption from sin and death was provided. Think of our Heavenly Father's love in giving his only begotten Son to suffer and die! Think, too, of what it cost Jesus in terms of mental and physical suffering to be our Redeemer, and the Redeemer of all mankind! To call to mind these examples of divine love and compassion for the sin-cursed race should beget in us a renewed determination to be faithful in carrying out the terms of our consecration to do God's will.

Jesus knew from the beginning of his ministry that he was to die sacrificially and had so announced to his disciples. He had said that he would give his flesh "for the life of the world." (John 6:51) The disciples did not grasp the reality of this. Even when it became apparent to them that Jesus would be killed by his enemies, they did not understand why it was necessary for him to die. This meant that Jesus bore the burden of his last trying hours with little benefit of human companionship, understanding and comfort.

In the "upper room," Peter professed great love for his Master and his willingness to die for him if necessary, and no doubt he was sincere in this profession of loyalty. (Mark 14:15,29-31) However, Peter, like the rest, when needed most by his Master, fell asleep. This was in the Garden of Gethsemane. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me," Jesus said to Peter, James and John, whom he asked to accompany him into the garden. Then Jesus went a little further, and with great earnestness, prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." After praying, Jesus returned to the three

disciples and found them asleep, and he said to Peter who had professed such great love, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"—Matt. 26:37-40

How much it would have meant to Jesus to know that at least one human being was entering into his feelings with some degree of understanding. Yet he was kind to his disciples. He admonished them to "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," and added, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (vs. 41) He knew that Peter and the others really did love him, and that in their hearts they were willing to do all they could to help him.

A greater test of Jesus' devotion and love for his Father, and doing of his Father's will, was yet to come. It was difficult enough to realize that he must stand alone as far as human help was concerned, but he still had his Father to comfort and sustain him. Even in Gethsemane, while the Father did not remove the "cup," he comforted his beloved Son, and gave him strength to endure the harrowing experiences of being hailed before his accusers, condemned to death, beaten, and hung upon a cross.—Luke 22:43

Through all of this Jesus was calm and serene, humbly submitting to his 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 condemnation as far as the religious leaders of Israel were concerned. "Thou hast said," was his reply. (Matt. 26:63,64) Later, when asked by Pilate if he were a king, Jesus said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." (John 18:37) He knew that in view of this confession of the truth Pilate could do nothing to save his life, for his enemies would press the charge

that it was treason against their Roman masters.

Even while hanging on the cross, enduring excruciating pain, Jesus was still composed, and was alert to a final opportunity to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. When the thief asked, “Jesus! remember me, whensoever thou shalt come into thy kingdom,” his reply was, “Verily I say unto thee this day: With me, shalt thou be in Paradise.” (Luke 23:42,43, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) While Satan, the prince of this world, was succeeding in putting the “King of the Jews” to death, Jesus knew that the long-promised Messianic kingdom for which he had taught his disciples to pray, would be established in due time, and that then “all families of the earth” would be blessed.—John 19:19; Matt. 6:10; Gen. 12:3

As Jesus hung on the cross there came over him an even greater realization that he had no human friends to whom he could look for sympathy and comfort. The knowledge of this startling fact seems to have drawn him to recall the prophetic prayer of Psalm 22, in which incidents that took place while he was hanging on the cross are mentioned. Although this Psalm spoke much in the way of the suffering and ignominy which Jesus would suffer, this would have been further proof to him that, by these things, he was obediently fulfilling the testimony of the Scriptures. Thus, he could be comforted, in measure, by this reassurance.

Realizing this, the Master began to cry out to his Father the opening words of the Psalm, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (Ps. 22:1) As the Psalm continues, Jesus is represented as saying, “Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted,

and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”—vss. 4-8

As Jesus hung upon the cross, he heard the crowd that watched him actually saying these things. “He trusted in God,” they said. “Let him deliver him.” (Matt. 27:43) When Jesus heard these prophesied utterances of the people, he reached out in his prayer to find some basis for renewed hope, perhaps recalling these words: “Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.”—Ps. 22:9-11

In his agony of mind and body Jesus continued to pray, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. ... they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”—Ps. 22:14-18

Although it was necessary for Jesus to fully take the sinner’s place in death, he realized that even in this, his Father was sustaining him. This is

indicated in the prayer, as it is continued in Psalm 22, “Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.”—vss. 23,24

As he took his last breath, Jesus was again seeing the smile of his Father’s countenance. In faith and confidence he could say, “It is finished.” “Into thy hands I commend my spirit”—my life, my all. (John 19:30; Luke 23:46) He had been led as a lamb to the slaughter, and now his sacrifice was finished. The Passover “Lamb of God” had been slain, and as we again partake of the emblems which represent his broken body and shed blood, we can do so with grateful appreciation of the love which provided redemption and life for us at so great a cost.

SUFFERINGS OF “THE CHRIST” CLASS

We can rejoice that Jesus’ personal suffering was completed on Calvary nearly two-thousand years ago. He alone faithfully supplied the redemptive merit as the Passover “Lamb of God.” However, at this Memorial season we should also be reminded of the great privilege of suffering, sacrifice and service which we have been given as members of “the Christ” class. This is not for the purpose of adding anything to Jesus’ redemptive offering, for indeed we cannot do that. Rather, we are invited to suffer and serve in order to develop us as sympathetic high priests for the great work which lies ahead of bringing mankind back into harmony with the Creator, and also for the purpose of helping and encouraging fellow members *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) of Christ's "body." Paul spoke of this great privilege in this way: "Now, am I rejoicing in the sufferings on your behalf, and am filling up the things that lack of the tribulations of the Christ, in my flesh, in behalf of his body, which is the assembly."—Col. 1:24, *Rotherham*

To remember Jesus as our example in faithfulness, and in suffering, should be a great incentive to continue following him. We are told, "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." (Heb. 12:3,4) We have not yet "resisted unto blood," which is a figurative way of saying that we have not yet fully given up our lives, nor yet been faithful even "unto death," as Jesus was. (Rev. 2:10) Indeed, when we compare ourselves to Jesus, we realize how little we have suffered, and are suffering, compared to him.

The Memorial season is an appropriate time to reexamine our own position. Are we engaging in our privileges of sacrifice and service as faithfully as we intended to do when we first entered the narrow way? Are we, unwittingly, perhaps, taking an easier way? As we consider Jesus at this Memorial time, we will want to make sure that we are among those who continue voluntarily to keep our sacrifice on the altar. (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15) This should be regardless of the cost in terms of inconvenience, weariness, misunderstanding, and even suffering.

These thoughts should naturally come to mind as we "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." It is only those who endure "unto the end" who will receive the "great salvation."

(Heb. 2:3; 3:6,14) “Ye have need of patience,” wrote Paul, “that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise,” and James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [Greek: trial, proving]: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—Heb. 10:36; James 1:12

The Hebrew brethren, when they were first “illuminated” with the light of the Gospel message, “endured a great fight of afflictions,” but this was not enough. (Heb. 10:32) For us also, our initial love and zeal for the Lord and for his service should be continued, day by day, year by year, even to the end of our earthly walk. “Let us not be weary in well doing,” Paul wrote, “for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) To consider Jesus, and the contradiction of sinners which he endured should do much to prevent us from becoming weary and faint in our minds.

THE TIME IS SHORT

Those enlightened by God’s Word of Truth know that we are living in the end of the age. How many more years we will have the privilege of partaking of the Memorial emblems we do not know, but we are assured that the fruition of our hopes is near. The consciousness of this should give added meaning to this year’s Memorial remembrance, and cause us to redouble our efforts in the weeks and months ahead to “consider” Jesus and to be like him.

When instituting the symbolic emblems of the Memorial, Jesus told his disciples that he would not drink the cup with them again until “in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matt. 26:29) Then, of course, it will be

a cup of unmitigated joy, for all the sacrifice and sufferings of Christ will be finished. Jesus himself was confident of this final outcome of joy and triumph. In another prophetic prayer Jesus is represented as saying to his Heavenly Father, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Ps. 16:11

This blessed hope of again being in the actual presence of his Father was one of the joys set before Jesus which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. Paul tells us that Jesus is now "set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1,2) The glorified Jesus promised, "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

This, then, is one of the joys set before us, and what a powerful incentive to faithfulness it should be! The time is near—so very near—when we shall see our Master's face. John wrote, "We shall see him as he is." (I John 3:1-3) What a glorious morning of joy that will be in contrast with the present experience of suffering. When we have entered into his presence with joy, and are partaking of that cup with him in the kingdom, how light our present trials will seem as we look back upon them from that vantage point of glory!

As we contemplate the "glory that should follow" the present privileges of suffering, sacrifice and service for Christ's sake, we could almost pray for God to hasten the time. (I Pet. 1:11) Yet we know that he has his own due time, and that he also knows best what experiences we need, what tests of patience and devotion are essential to prepare us to occupy

the place where we shall “see him as he is.” Therefore, we say to our longing hearts the poetic words, “Be calm and sink into his will,” assured that the time appointed by divine wisdom is best.

NOT ALONE

Jesus, as we have seen, endured those final and excruciating tests alone, so far as human understanding and sympathy were concerned. With us, however, it is different. Little groups of the Lord’s consecrated people will come together in remembrance of him, either in person, or, as will more likely be the case this year due to the worldwide pandemic, by means of virtual gatherings. Regardless of this, however, each brother and sister will realize a sense of companionship, a fraternity of interest and love which should be a great stimulus to all.

What a great blessing this is! Jesus admonished that we should “love one another” as he loved us. (John 13:34) However, just as partaking of the Memorial emblems is merely a symbol of what the sacrifice of Christ means to us, so it is also of the blessedness of interest which exists among the brethren. May the Memorial season, then, be a time to renew our determination to lay down our lives for one another, and to appreciate more than ever the priceless heritage of fellowship we enjoy with one another even while still tabernacled in the flesh.

The privilege of laying down our lives for the brethren does not imply spectacular demonstrations of sacrifice, but rather the faithful use of the little opportunities we have of rendering service when, and in the manner, most needed. We can all cooperate in the general effort to reach and comfort

the brethren worldwide. We should also be on the alert to speak that word of comfort, perform that little act of kindness, and breathe that word of prayer, on behalf of those whom we know to be going through special trials. It is at such times that “the fellowship of kindred minds” means so much.

REJOICING FOR THE WORLD

Returning to the prayerful words of the twenty-second Psalm, Jesus is shown as exulting over the triumph of his Father’s cause, and that as a result of his sacrifice the time would come when “all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD.” (vss. 27,28) Thus, even under the extremely trying circumstances surrounding his death, and in the final moments of his earthly life, Jesus’ thoughts were upon others. He rejoiced in the eternal purpose of his suffering, that all the families of the earth would be blessed in due time.

May it be so with us, as again we commemorate Jesus’ death. Let us remember, and be glad, that the great and ultimate purpose of that which we memorialize is the reconciling of the world to God, and let us rejoice that soon this purpose will be accomplished. This is God’s viewpoint, for he loved the world and gave his Son to be man’s Redeemer. (John 3:16) Jesus also loved the world, and gave his life that the world might live. May this same love, and the Memorial celebration this year, help to fill our hearts more fully with an increased longing for the time when we will have the glorious opportunity of association with Jesus in restoring all the willing and obedient to health and life, and of establishing worldwide peace and righteousness. ■