

Thoughts on the Memorial Season

*“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

THE PASSOVER SEASON, as celebrated by the Jews, is approaching, beginning this year on the evening of April 8. However, the interest of Christians in this season centers especially in the slaying of the

lamb, which preceded the seven-day Passover feast, and pointed forward to the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus. (John 1:29) Our commemoration, therefore, relates to the greatest event of all history, the sacrificial death of the Savior of the world. This year our celebration properly begins on the evening of April 7.

As recorded in Exodus 12:1-27, the Israelites were commanded to celebrate the Passover as the first feature of the Law and as one of their greatest memorials as a nation. Hence, we find that in some degree the Passover is still celebrated by Jews in all parts of the world. They still have a measure of respect for the Passover as an ancient custom. However, most do not seem to give much serious thought to the meaning of this celebration.

Why was the Passover lamb slain and eaten? Why was the blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels of their dwellings? God so commanded, but what was the reason, the motive, behind the divine command? What was the lesson and the object of this ordinance? Truly, a reasonable God gives reasonable commands, and will, in due time, cause mankind to understand the significance of all his requirements. In the case of the Israelites, all the various features of the laws and ordinances given to them by God, through Moses, were designed to foreshadow important aspects of the divine purpose and plan, yet to be revealed and brought to pass.—Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11

FIRST-FRUITS AND AFTER-FRUITS

Blessed are those whose eyes can see that Jesus was indeed “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” The cancellation of the world’s inherited Adamic sin is to be effected by the application of the value of Jesus’ perfect ransom sacrifice in due time for the benefit of all mankind. Only the footstep followers of the Master have as yet received of the value of the ransom provided by Jesus’ death. Greatly favored are those who can see that as the whole world lost God’s favor and came under the divine sentence of death, so it was necessary that a satisfaction of justice should be made before this sentence could be removed. Therefore, as Paul and Peter harmoniously declare, “Christ died for our sins,”—“the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” (I Cor. 15:3; I Pet. 3:18) Thus he opened up a new way—a way to life everlasting.—Heb. 10:19,20

The Scriptures call the church of Christ the “church of the firstborn,” “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures,” and “the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” (Heb. 12:23; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) These expressions imply that ultimately there will be others who will become part of God’s family—“after-fruits.” Christian people in general, however, seem to have overlooked the implications of these Scriptures. Most have generally come to believe that only those who are designated in the Bible as the “firstfruits” will be saved—that there will be no after-fruits.

However, the Passover picture clearly indicates that it was God’s purpose to save all the Israelites. As a nation they aptly represent all of mankind that will ever come into harmony with God and be granted everlasting life. Let us note that there were two great miracles associated with the Passover and the subsequent deliverance of Israel from Egypt. First, there was the miracle in which the firstborns were “passed over” by God’s angel and spared from the death associated with the tenth plague. (Exod. 12:21-23) Secondly, there was the miracle at the Red Sea, where by divine power the whole nation of Israel was delivered and led across the channel on dry ground. These “passed over” to the other side of the Red Sea and were saved, while the hosts of Pharaoh were overwhelmed and drowned. (Exod. 14:21-30) The Israelites’ passing over the Red Sea pictures the ultimate deliverance from the power of sin and death afforded to every creature of Adam’s race who desires to come into accord with the Lord and to render him worship. Thus it was that not one Israelite, who willingly

obeyed the Lord's instructions, was left behind in Egyptian bondage.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FIRSTBORNS

The special interest of the Christian at the present time is the passing over of the firstborns of Israel in the land of Egypt. Only the firstborn ones were endangered on that night, and their deliverance from death was necessary in order to affect the liberation of the entire nation from Egyptian bondage. Similarly, only the "church of the firstborn," the faithful and obedient footstep followers of Christ, are under the sprinkled blood of Jesus and are now being passed over during this nighttime of sin and death still upon the world of mankind.

We see, in harmony with the Scriptures, that during the present Gospel Age only "the firstfruits unto God," "the church of the firstborn," have sufficient light and knowledge which permits them to be on trial for eternal life. If faithful unto death, these will be "passed over," as were the firstborn of Israel. The remainder of mankind, all who will desire to follow the greater Moses—Christ and his church—in the coming Messianic kingdom, shall be led forth from the bondage of sin and death. Thus, at the present time, these are not part of the called-out firstborn class, nevertheless, they are not in danger of eternal destruction, for their time of deliverance and subsequent judgment "in righteousness" is yet future.—Acts 17:31

The church of the firstborn consists of those of mankind who, in advance of the remainder of the race, have had the eyes of their understanding opened. They have come to a realization not only of their condition of bondage and their need of deliverance,

but also of God's willingness to fulfill in them all his good promises. Furthermore, they are such as have responded to the grace of God, have made a full dedication of themselves to him and his service, and in return have been begotten of the Holy Spirit. They abide under the merit of the blood of Christ, just as the firstborns of Israel remained within the houses whose doorposts and lintels had been sprinkled with the blood of the Passover lamb.—I Pet. 1:18-20

Through the begetting of the Holy Spirit and the greater knowledge and privileges which they enjoy in every way, the church of the firstborn has a far greater responsibility than has the world. The Apostle Peter identifies this called-out class as, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (I Pet. 1:2) For any of these to go out from under the blood would imply a disregard of God's mercy, and would signify that they were indifferent to divine goodness and grace. The Apostle Paul admonished the church along this very line, that they "receive not the grace of God in vain." (II Cor. 6:1) Thus is shown the great importance, as Peter states, of "sanctification" and "obedience" in order to be of the "elect" firstborn class during the present age.

By and by the night of sin and death will have passed away, and the glorious morn of deliverance will have come. (Ps. 30:5) Christ and his faithful church, the greater Moses, will lead forth and deliver, all the world of mankind. (Deut. 18:15,18,19; Acts 3:22-25) All will be given the opportunity to come to know, reverence, honor and obey the will of God. That day of deliverance will be the thousand-year

kingdom of Christ, at the close of which all the willing and obedient of mankind will be forever free from the bondage of sin and death.—I Cor. 15:22-26; Rev. 20:4; 21:1-7

JESUS OUR PASSOVER LAMB

The Apostle Paul positively identified the Passover Lamb with our Lord Jesus, saying, “Our Passover Lamb has already been offered in sacrifice—even Christ. Therefore let us keep the festival.” (I Cor. 5:7,8, *Weymouth New Testament*) He informs us that we all need the blood of sprinkling, not upon our houses, but upon our hearts. (Heb. 10:22) We are to partake of the Lamb by appropriating to ourselves the merit of Christ, the value of his ransom sacrifice. We must also eat of the pure, unleavened bread of truth, if we would be strong and prepared for our deliverance into the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. Thus we “put on” Christ, not merely by faith, but more and more we put on his character and are transformed into his glorious image in our hearts and lives.—Rom. 12:2; 13:14; Col. 3:12-17

By faith, we are to feed on Christ, as the Jews fed on the literal lamb. (Rom. 4:7,8,11) Instead of the bitter herbs, which aided and whetted their appetites, the Lord permits us to have bitter experiences and trials caused by our commitment to righteous living and walking in Christ’s footsteps. These help to wean our affection from earthly things, and to give us increased appetite to feed upon the Lamb and the unleavened bread of truth. We, too, are to remember that we have here “no continuing city.” Rather, as “strangers and pilgrims,” and with staff in hand, we are to gird ourselves for our journey to the heavenly Canaan, and (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) to all the glorious things which God has in reservation for the church of the firstborn.—Heb. 13:14; I Pet. 2:11

A MEMORIAL INSTITUTED

On the same night of his betrayal, just preceding his crucifixion, Jesus gathered his apostles in the upper room. “As they were eating,” the Master instituted a new remembrance—a memorial—based upon the foundation of the Passover picture, saying, “This do in remembrance of me.” (Matt. 26:26; Luke 22:8-14; I Cor. 11:24,25) We recall the circumstances of this first Memorial. There was the Lord’s blessing of the bread and of the cup, the fruit of the vine, and his declaration that these represented his broken body and shed blood. There was, too, the invitation that all his followers should participate by symbolically feeding upon him, and by partaking of the merit of his blood, his sacrifice. How blessed are these thoughts to those who have been rightly exercised to remember the precious Lamb of God!

In presenting to his disciples the emblematic use of bread, Jesus said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” The evident meaning of his words is: This bread symbolizes or represents my body. The bread was not actually his body, for in no sense would it have been possible for them to have partaken of him literally. The picture is enhanced when we recognize that the pure, unleavened bread represented our Lord’s sinless flesh. Leaven is a symbol of sin, and under the Jewish law, the Israelites were especially commanded to remove all leaven from their homes at the Passover season. (Exod. 12:18-20; I Cor. 5:6-8) On another occasion Jesus gave a lesson which further

clarified this symbol. He said, “The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” “I am the bread of life.” “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”—John 6:33,35,51

In order to appreciate how we are to eat, or appropriate, this “living bread,” it is necessary for us to understand just what the bread signifies. According to our Lord’s explanation of the matter, it was his flesh which he sacrificed for us. It was not his pre-human existence as a spirit being that was sacrificed, although that was laid aside, in order that he might take our human nature. It was the fact that our Lord Jesus—as a perfect human being—was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) He was without any contamination from Father Adam, and hence free from sin. This enabled him to become the Redeemer of Adam and his race by giving his life “a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

When we understand that it was the pure, spotless nature of our Lord Jesus that was laid down on behalf of sinners, we see of what it is that we are privileged to partake. The very thing that he laid down for us we are to “eat,” appropriate to ourselves. Jesus’ perfect human life was given to redeem all the race of man from condemnation to death, to provide the opportunity for all to return to human perfection and everlasting life. We are to realize this and thus accept him as our Savior from death.

Jesus also instituted a second symbol as he and the apostles sat in the upper room. It was the

“cup,” or “fruit of the vine,” which he said represented his shed blood. (Matt. 26:27-29) In order that any of the race of Adam might profit from the sacrificial death of Jesus, it was necessary that he should rise from the tomb, and that he should ascend to the Father to deposit in the hands of divine justice, as it were, the value of his perfect sacrificial offering as man’s Redeemer. That value was represented by his shed blood, which, in turn, is shown emblematically by the cup offered by Jesus to his disciples the night before his death. As relates to the world, the benefits to accrue to them from the value of the blood of Jesus will be manifest in his coming kingdom. Under that arrangement, Christ Jesus, along with the faithful “firstborn” class, will oversee the bringing of mankind—all who will avail themselves of the wonderful privileges then to be offered—back to righteousness and to harmony with God.

The firstborn of this age, by faith in their Redeemer, now receive a similar blessing, though by a somewhat different arrangement. They are “justified by faith,” reckoned righteous in God’s sight. Their “justification” is made possible only by the blood of Jesus, which he presented to the hands of God’s justice upon his resurrection from the dead. Thus, the partaking of the “cup” at the Memorial season is a reminder to us of the appropriation to ourselves, by faith, of the value represented in the precious blood of Christ. It is by this mechanism that God has reckoned us as justified, or righteous, in his sight, and has bestowed upon us all the rights and privileges attached thereto.—Rom. 3:24-26; 5:1,8,9

LOOKING TOWARD THE KINGDOM

On the occasion of the institution of the Memorial supper, our Lord had something to say about his Father's kingdom, a subject which was the great theme of his entire earthly ministry. On previous occasions he had promised his faithful followers a share in this kingdom, declaring that he would go away to "receive for himself a kingdom," and would come again and receive them to himself to share in it. (Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:11-17; 22:29,30) He then added that this Memorial which he was instituting would find its fulfillment in the kingdom, and that he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine, "until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."—Matt. 26:29

Just what our Lord meant by this statement might be difficult to determine positively. However, it does not seem inconsistent to understand him to mean that in contrast to the trials and sufferings—even death—symbolized in his cup presently, there would be jubilation in the kingdom. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." (Isa. 53:11) Christ Jesus will look back over the trials and difficulties endured in faithful obedience to the Father's will and rejoice as he sees the grand outcome of blessings which will come to all mankind. This joy will be shared by all his disciples who have similarly drunk of this cup, and who have received his promise that, if faithful, they shall reign with him. (Heb. 12:2; II Cor. 4:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) When the kingdom shall have been established, looking back they will praise the way that God has led them each day unto the end of their earthly sojourn, even though it has been a narrow way of self-sacrifice and of service toward others.

Our dear Master's faith stood the test in all these trying hours which he knew to be so near the time of his apprehension and death. The fact that he rendered thanks to the Father for the bread and the cup is indicative of his joyful acquiescence in all the sufferings which the breaking of the bread and the crushing of the grapes implied. He was fully satisfied with the Father's arrangement. In line with this spirit was the singing of a hymn as they parted. (Matt. 26:30) It was, no doubt, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father that his course on earth was so nearly finished, and that he had found thus far grace sufficient for his need.

It would only be a few hours later that night when Jesus would be betrayed into the hands of his enemies—ironically, the religious leaders among his Jewish brethren—and be arrested. We behold how calm he was as this scene unfolded, and thereafter as he was brought before the chief priest, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. As Isaiah had prophesied, "He opened not his mouth: he is brought 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 see him faithful, courageous to the very last, and we have his assurance that he could have asked the Father for more than twelve legions of angels for his protection. (Matt. 26:53) Yet, instead of petitioning for aid to escape his sacrifice, he only sought the strength to endure it faithfully. What a lesson is here for all Jesus' foot-step followers!

On the other hand, we recall that even among his loyal disciples, the most courageous forsook the Master and fled, and one of them, in his fear and

perplexity, even denied his Lord! (vss. 69-75) What an occasion this is for examining our own hearts as respects the degree of our faith, our courage and our willingness to suffer with him who redeemed us. What an opportunity is thus afforded us to reinforce our minds with the resolution that we will not deny our Master under any circumstances or conditions, and that we will confess him not only with our lips, but also by our conduct.

OPPOSITION FROM THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

It is astounding to think that it was God's professed people who crucified the "Prince of life." (Acts 3:14,15) Not only this, but it was the leaders of their religious thought, their chief priests, scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law, rather than the common people, who were responsible for this dreadful act. We remember the Master's words, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." (John 15:18) It was primarily the religious world that hated him. Realizing this, we should not be surprised if the same is true for us, his followers. We are not to be astonished, then, if opposition to the message of truth should come from the more prominent religious teachers of the various sects of Christianity of our day. Such opposition, however, should not cause us to hate either those who may be our own opponents, or those who persecuted our Lord to the point of death. Rather, we are to remember the words of the Apostle Peter respecting this matter: "I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also."—Acts 3:17, *New American Standard Bible*

Indeed, a lack of knowledge together with blindness of heart and mind is at the source of the

oppositions against Christ and his footstep followers. The Father permits it to be so now, until the members of the church of the firstborn shall have filled up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. 1:24) Soon, as our dear Lord declared, those who now partake of his symbolic “body” and “blood,” and who follow in his footsteps of suffering, sacrifice and service, will drink with him the new cup of victory and joy in the kingdom. With that glorious morning will begin the great work of the world’s release from the bonds of sin and death, the blessed privilege of uplifting mankind, and bringing to pass the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:21

The thought before the mind of each of those who participate in the annual Memorial celebration should be that expressed in the words of Paul: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:17) With these thoughts respecting the passing over of our sins as the firstborns through the merit of the precious blood of the Lamb, and our privilege of sharing with our blessed Lord in his experiences of suffering and of glory, we may indeed “keep the feast” with joy, not merely in this special manner once a year, but even in the midst of trials and difficulties. (I Cor. 5:8) By continuing faithful as Jesus’ followers, very soon we shall have the great privilege of joining him in leading forth the world of mankind out of the bondage of sin and death, to the land of promise—earth, man’s eternal home. ■