

The Symbolic Bread and Cup

*“Whenever you eat
this bread or drink
of this cup, you are
proclaiming that
the Lord has died
for you.”*

—I Corinthians

11:26, J.B. Phillips

New Testament

IN A FEW SHORT DAYS,

on April 11th after sunset, footstep followers of Jesus throughout the world will gather together in little groups to once again commemorate the anniversary of the Master’s death nearly two

thousand years ago. This Memorial Supper will be a simple service, consisting of two symbols, unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, emblematic of the ransom offering provided by Jesus and its benefits to us now and in due time to the entire world of mankind. The comments which follow address the meaning and importance of these simple emblems.

JESUS—THE SYMBOLIC BREAD

When Jesus instituted the Memorial of his death with his disciples in the upper room, he said concerning the emblem of the bread, as recorded in Matthew 26:26, “Take, eat; this is my body.” What

did Jesus mean by this statement? Earlier in his ministry, he hinted as to the meaning when he said, quoting from John 6:33 & 51, "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven: ... the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

In the above verses, Jesus makes three critical points: 1) he identifies himself as the bread of God, or the living bread; 2) he says that the bread represents his flesh, or body; and 3) he states that he will give his flesh, his earthly body, for the life of the world. Thus, when instituting the memorial of his death, and saying "take, eat; this is my body," Jesus was inviting his disciples, his footstep followers, to partake of the benefits represented in the "flesh" that he would soon give for the life of the world.

In the foregoing words from John 6, Jesus was speaking in advance of the ransom to be provided by the death of his flesh, his body, which would, in due time, provide life for Father Adam and for the entire world. This was to be a "ransom for all," Paul said in I Timothy 2:5,6. The Apostle John, when writing his Gospel account much later, said, as recorded in John 1:14, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." In I John 4:2, the apostle also declares, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

John realized, having been begotten of the Holy Spirit, the important truth that to provide a ransom for Adam and his race, it was necessary that the Redeemer be a man, "made flesh," but not only that, a perfect man, an exact corresponding price to

Adam before he sinned. Jesus, who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” was the only human being, the only one of flesh and blood, who met these qualifications. (Heb. 7:26) As a perfect man, Jesus was not condemned to death as was the rest of the race. However, to provide the ransom price, he voluntarily gave up his perfect human life, his flesh, his earthly body, literally, in order that the opportunity for a restoration of life might be provided to Adam and all his progeny.

AN INTERMEDIATE WORK

In God’s plan, however, there was to be an intermediate work before the benefits of the ransom would be available for the world in general. Both Paul and Peter speak of this aspect of God’s arrangement. In Colossians 1:21,22, we read the words of Paul, “You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight.” In I Peter 2:24, the Apostle Peter states concerning Jesus, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”

These words are spoken to all those who have given themselves to the Lord in full consecration. When we partake of the emblem of the bread on the night of the Memorial service, we are acknowledging, by way of remembrance, the fact that in advance of the world, we have been given the great privilege of partaking of the benefits of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, as shown by the death of his perfect flesh, his body. Thus we have been enabled

to offer ourselves in consecration to God, and to stand before him, as Paul says, “unblameable and unreprouvable.”

By being begotten by God’s Holy Spirit and remaining in this blessed position for the development of the New Creature life which has begun in us, we have the hope of sharing with Jesus in the administration of the benefits of his redemptive sacrifice in the kingdom—that is, of assisting in the blessing and uplifting of all mankind. This understanding should be a part of our remembrance of Jesus as the symbolic “bread” of which we will partake.

SPIRITUAL FOOD

There is another important lesson connected to the symbolic bread, as represented in Jesus. Bread is food and provides nourishment. When Jesus instituted the Memorial supper as recorded in Matthew 26:26, the account states that he “took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples.” In olden times, when bread was served at a meal, it was not sliced as is mostly done today, but was in a loaf. The host would break off pieces of the loaf and give to his guests to eat. This points out that the bread served at a meal was not just to look at, nor to merely admire as a decorative item on the table. It was broken in pieces, and distributed, for the purpose of eating. It was food, nourishment, sustenance, in a very literal way.

Returning to John, chapter 6, we find that Jesus emphasized in numerous statements the great importance of our “eating his flesh,” this bread or food, as spiritual nourishment and life-giving

sustenance. Verse 27: “Labour not for the meat [food] which perisheth, but for that meat [food] which endureth unto everlasting life.” Verse 32: “Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” Verse 33: “The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven.” Verse 35: “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger.” Verse 51: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.” Verses 53-58: “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, ... ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, ... hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed. ... He that eateth my flesh, ... dwelleth in me, and I in him. ... He that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

Then, to impress upon his disciples the fact that he was not speaking of eating his literal flesh, he says, as recorded in verse 63: “The spirit it is that is giving life; the flesh doth not profit anything; the sayings that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (*Young’s Literal Translation*) It is the words Jesus spoke—his teachings, the record of his life, his example, his attitude and character, and everything else which proceeded from his perfect flesh that we can view and understand—which constitute the food, the bread broken for us to eat and be spiritually nourished thereby. When we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” in addition to its temporal significance, it speaks of our daily need to partake of the spiritual food that we find exemplified in

Jesus' life, words, and example. (Matt. 6:11) Symbolically speaking, our Lord is the carcass, the one upon whom we, as the eagles, gather together to feast upon.—Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:37

THE CUP—SYMBOL OF JESUS' BLOOD

In Exodus chapter 12 we have the instructions given by God to Moses and Aaron as to the keeping of the Passover, which was the means by which the Israelites would escape the tenth plague. We recall that this plague was to be the killing of all the first-born of every family in the land of Egypt. (Exod. 11:4-6) Various details are given as to the instructions to the Israelites in order to not be touched by this plague, but none were more important than the selection and killing of a lamb.—Exod. 12:3-6

As explained in verses 7, 12 & 13 of this account, blood from the slain lamb was to be put on the two side posts and the upper door post of their houses. When the angel of the Lord came through the land during that night, each house in which he saw the blood applied in this fashion, he would “pass over,” sparing the firstborn of that house.

Regardless of how the Israelites may have followed the other instructions recorded in Exodus 12, if they had failed, either to kill the lamb or to properly apply its blood, their firstborn would have died that night. In addition, as a nation, they most surely would not have been released by Pharaoh.

THE “LAMB OF GOD”

Many centuries later, when Jesus came to earth at his First Advent, at the age of thirty he came to John the Baptist to be baptized. John, whether familiar with the true significance of the Passover

or simply by divine revelation, as he saw Jesus coming to him, made one of the most profound statements of the Scriptures: “Behold the Lamb of God!”—John 1:29

By this statement, John announced that the antitypical, or greater, Passover Lamb was now on the scene. It was God’s purpose, and with full cooperation of his Son, that this greater lamb would be slain, and his blood, symbolically speaking, would be used to release a firstborn class from death during this present nighttime of sin. The lamb’s blood would then be subsequently used to free all mankind from their bondage to Adamic sin and death.

John the Baptist said this “Lamb of God” would accomplish this by “taking away the sin of the world.” That is, he would be a corresponding price, a ransom, for Adam. As a perfect human being, Jesus would voluntarily give up his life, thus redeeming Adam and his posterity, all mankind, from the penalty of sin and releasing them from its resulting bondage in due time.

When the time approached for Jesus, the Lamb of God, to be slain, he knew of its great significance in his Father’s plan, and so the night before his death he gathered his disciples together in an upper room. There he instituted a simple ceremony, in which by two symbols, “bread” and a “cup,” or “fruit of the vine,” a remembrance would be provided of his ransom sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Jesus asked his disciples to keep this simple ceremony as a Memorial of his death.—Matt. 26:26-29

After instituting the symbol of the bread, concerning which we have already addressed, Jesus established the symbol of the fruit of the vine, or cup.

Verse 27 reads, “And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it”; or, as the Mark account states, “and they all drank of it.” (Mark 14:23) “For this is my blood of the New Testament,” Jesus continued, “which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matt. 26:28) Paul adds to the Gospel account these words of Jesus, “This do ye, ... in remembrance of me.”—I Cor. 11:25

THE VALUE OF JESUS’ BLOOD

The cup, which literally contained the fruit of the vine, Jesus said represented only one thing. He said that this juice was emblematic, not literally but in symbol only, of his blood, which was about to be shed for the remission of sins. Jesus here identified this blood as being that of the greater Passover Lamb, which in only a matter of hours would be slain, and which would provide the ransom merit or value, symbolized by his shed blood.

This value, when applied into the hands of God’s justice, would be the means by which, as John the Baptist had proclaimed three and one-half years earlier, the “sin of the world,” Adamic sin, would be taken away. As Jesus himself stated, his blood would provide “remission of sins.” Everyone in the loins of Adam, the entire human race, would in due time be the beneficiaries of this one ransom offering, this one slain Passover Lamb of God. As Apostle John later confirmed, Jesus “is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice, *International Standard Version*] ... for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN

The due time for the benefits of this ransom merit to be received by mankind is to be in two parts.

First, a special class, not the literal firstborn as in the case of the Israelites' Passover, but the "church of the firstborn," would initially benefit from the blood of Jesus, the greater Passover Lamb. (Heb. 12:23) The Apostle Paul says that this called out firstborn class is "justified" by faith in the blood of Jesus, "by whom," he says, "we have now received the atonement."—Rom. 5:1,9,11

These "firstborn," in advance of the world of mankind, are the recipients of the imputed merit or value of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, which justifies them, releasing them from Adamic condemnation in God's sight. (Rom. 4:7,8,22-25) By a full and complete consecration, or dedication, to do the will of the Heavenly Father, these can be given a standing before him, and run toward "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," the calling of the present Gospel Age. (Phil. 3:14) What a privilege and responsibility it is for these to be of this special firstborn class, and to receive, in advance of the world, the imputation of Jesus' blood.

LIFE THROUGH THE BLOOD

In Egypt, when the blood was taken from the lamb, it signified two things. First, it showed the death of the lamb. Second, however, the blood meant life to the firstborn—immediately, during that night! Similarly, the merit of Jesus' sacrifice, symbolized by his blood, and emblematically shown in the cup, meant death to him as a man. To the "church of the firstborn," however, this blood means life because it has released these from Adamic condemnation in God's sight.

As stated in the law itself, it is life that is “in the blood.” (Lev. 17:11) This is what Jesus referenced when he spoke the words recorded in John 6:53-56. There he said to his disciples that if they did not drink of his blood, that is, receive of his ransom merit, “ye have no life in you,” but “whoso drinketh my blood hath eternal life.” Thus, “my blood is drink indeed.” “He that drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me.” That is, he belongs to Jesus, because Jesus has redeemed him. Paul likewise said concerning the church that Jesus “hath purchased [it] with his own blood.”—Acts 20:28

ALL TO BE DELIVERED

This cup, representing the blood of the Lamb, is not just for the firstborn, however. In the case of the Israelites, the entire nation, in the morning of a new day, was released from Egypt, and began their long journey to eventually reach the land which had been promised to their forefathers so many centuries before. As they began their journey, shortly after crossing the Red Sea, God established his law and his covenant with them, through Moses as their mediator, and Aaron and his sons as their priesthood.

Jesus gave indication of the greater significance to this when he said concerning the cup, as quoted earlier, that it represented the “blood of the new testament,” that is, a “new covenant.” (*ISV*) This statement by Jesus did not mean that the New Covenant would be immediately established. Just as the old Law Covenant did not come about until after the Passover night, after Israel’s release from bondage, and after the crossing of the Red Sea, so the New Covenant will not be set up until the end of

this nighttime of sin, and following man's passing through the sea of the time of trouble and into the kingdom arrangement.

Then, there will be a better Mediator and a better priesthood, Christ Jesus, the "mediator of the New Covenant," and a priesthood "after the order of Melchisedec." The "church of the firstborn" also, which are "written in heaven," will be part of the Christ class, and of the "royal priesthood," to bring blessings to all the families of the earth.—Heb. 12:23,24; 5:10; I Pet. 2:9; Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:8

When Jesus said that this cup represented the blood of the New Covenant, he was indicating that this future prospect for all mankind would be assured by the blood of his ransom sacrifice. The New Covenant would surely come in due time. This is what Paul meant when he said that the sacrifice of Jesus constituted "the bringing in of a better hope, ... by the which we draw nigh unto God," and "by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better [covenant]."—Heb. 7:19,22

Therefore, as we approach the annual Memorial Supper, let us remember as we partake of the bread, the perfect human life which Jesus gave up in order that we and the entire world, might live; and also, the spiritual food, the bread broken for our nourishment, which we are to partake daily, of Jesus' words, teachings, life, and example. Let us also, soberly, but also joyfully, partake of the symbolic cup, remembering its significance for us and for all mankind, as the life-giving blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, provided by the great love which our Heavenly Father and his Son have manifested toward us and toward all mankind.

Paul wrote: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast.” (I Cor. 5:7,8) May these words represent our symbolic feasting on Jesus, the bread of life, and appropriating to ourselves the value of the life-giving blood of his sacrifice—not just one night in the year, but each day of our Christian walk, even unto death. ■