Memorial Meditations: In Remembrance of Jesus

"He said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." —Luke 22:15, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

JESUS GAVE EXPLICIT DI-rections to his followers that they were to commemorate his death, and the memorial that he instituted, each year on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan. The time has come once again for the Lord's people in all parts of the world to gather together for this very important purpose. By partaking of the unleavened bread, we acknowledge Jesus' perfect and sinless body that was broken for us; and by drinking of the cup, we participate in his shed blood which was poured out for us, as well as the whole human creation, to be testified in due time. This year we will memorialize his death on the evening of April 1.

WITH EARNEST DESIRE

Two of our Lord's apostles, Peter and John, were instructed to go to a specific house where they would be shown a furnished "upper room" by a man that they would recognize as one carrying a "pitcher of water." They were to follow him to the place that they were to prepare, and where Jesus would eat the final Passover supper with his disciples. (Luke 22:7-12) They promptly left to carry out their mission, "They went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him."—vss. 13,14

When Jesus said to his disciples that he earnestly desired to eat this final Passover with them, he further stated, "I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (vs. 16) Our Lord used the word 'desired' when speaking to the select people of God to emphasize his very strong feelings of love and devotion for them. The word desire means 'to set the heart upon' or to 'long after something.'

PAUL'S DESIRE

The Apostle Paul used this same word desire in the letter he wrote to the brethren at Philippi, telling them that he earnestly desired to be with our Lord Jesus, but that he also longed to be with them. He said, "I am indeed, hard pressed by the two things;—(I have an earnest desire for the returning, and being with Christ, since it is very much to be preferred;)—but to remain in the flesh is more requisite on your account." (Phil. 1:23,24, *WED*) He used this same word desire again to describe his

longing to be with the Thessalonian brethren. "We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire."—I Thess. 2:17

EATING IN THE KINGDOM

Jesus understood that his earthly ministry would be finished in a very short time because 'the hour was come.' He expressed his earnest desire to share his last Passover supper with those who were his very special followers. It was in this connection that he wanted his disciples to know that he was the substitute lamb of God, and that, as the true antitype, he would soon be slain. 'I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'

Those who were gathered together in the upper room that night with Jesus were given a brief glimpse of his future kingdom. He told them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (vss. 28-30) These were wonderful words of encouragement in light of the great humiliation and suffering he was about to endure.

JUDGING THE WORLD

Jesus was speaking about his future kingdom, when his faithful bride class would be with him in glory and sharing in the great work of judgment. This wonderful promise had a much deeper and spiritual significance. It was not yet time, however,

for the Holy Spirit of understanding that would later be given to them to enlighten them to the true meaning and importance of his words.

The Apostle Paul gives a spiritual perspective and significance to the matter of the faithful church sharing in the work of future judgment. He explains, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" (I Cor. 6:2,3) The authority to execute justice and judgment during Christ's kingdom would be given to our glorified Lord Jesus and the faithful members of his church. "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—Acts 17:31

The apostle explains this further in his letter to the brethren at Corinth by saying, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." (I Cor. 4:5) Jesus was eluding to this great work of his future kingdom during his last Passover meal and conversation with the disciples in the upper room.

The psalmist also foresaw this time, and wrote these inspiring prophetic words of inspiration, "Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let

the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."—Ps. 96:10-13

A CORRESPONDING PRICE

It was essential that Jesus leave his spiritual home and be born into the world as a perfect human being in order to be the Redeemer of the fallen human race. It was his death as a perfect man that provided the redemption price for sin. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that [in whom, *Marginal Translation*] all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Paul explains the matter further, "If by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."—vs.17

The main objective of the Master's First Advent was thus accomplished by his death, and resurrection. It is God's will for his people to commemorate the death of Jesus and to have any hope of future life through him. Paul addresses this point, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

THE LAMB OF GOD

As Jesus was the true antitypical sacrifice, we read about the typical lamb in connection with God's instructions to Moses, when he said, "Speak

ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month [Nisan] they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house." (Exod. 12:3) God further directed Moses, "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month [Nisan]: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it."—vss. 5-7

We believe that these instructions concerning the selection of an unblemished lamb of the first year represents our Lord Jesus, and that the killing of the lamb pictures his death and sacrificial life poured out for the sins of the whole world. This fact is substantiated by the words of John the Baptist when he recognized Jesus. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29

RIDING INTO JERUSALEM

The last few days of Jesus' earthly life were momentous ones. While he understood the meaning of events as they followed one another in rapid succession, his disciples were in large measure unable to comprehend their meaning. Israel as a whole was also blind to the most important event in the history of the world that was then being carried out in Judea.

It was during that time that Jesus rode through the gates of the city of Jerusalem presenting himself to Israel as their foretold king and Messiah. "When they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." (Matt. 21:1-5) Matthew was referring back to the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9) that foretold this important event.

Many of the Jewish people were in great anticipation of the imminent arrival of Jesus in the city of Jerusalem, and began to prepare the way for his coming. When they saw him approaching, they accepted him as their long-promised king and, "Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."—John 12:13

THE DESPISED ONE

Because of envy, Jesus had never been accepted by Israel's religious rulers, the scribes and Pharisees, although certain individuals among them may have been impressed with his teachings and the wonderful miracles that he performed. As a group they had been antagonistic toward him from

the beginning of his earthly ministry, and never gave up an opportunity to do what they could to prejudice the people against him. The people, however, liked the gracious words which the Master spoke. "Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" (John 7:40,41) Much discussion followed, and a division arose among them, but "The officers answered, Never man spake like this man."—vs. 46

MARVELOUS MIRACLES

Even more convincing to the general Jewish public were the many miracles that Jesus performed. This wonderful work is reflected by the words of the man who had been blind from birth when our Lord exercised his mighty power to heal him. The Pharisees refused to believe that he had given sight to the blind man by taking clay, mixing it with his own saliva, anointing his eyes, and then commanding him to wash at the pool of Siloam. (John 9:1-15) Instead of recognizing and appreciating the marvelous grace and exceeding power that Jesus possessed, some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day." (vs.16) Then the religious leaders of Israel pressed their inquiry, still not believing that the man was blind from birth. "Again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." (vss. 24,25) The

blind man acknowledged that he did not understand everything involved in the great blessings he had just received, but he did answer the religious leaders that once he was blind, but now he could see.

Besides the blind, there were lepers who had been cleansed, cripples who had been made to walk, some who were possessed by devils had been freed from evil spirits, and even the dead had been raised to life again. Perhaps very few of these were able to grasp very much of what our Lord Jesus had taught, but they did know that he had blessed them and their relatives and friends knew about it too. A considerable number in Israel were favorably disposed toward Jesus, and would not be easily influenced by either the scribes or Pharisees to join in any kind of scheme to take his life. Above all, Jesus was overshadowed by the wonderful providential care of his Heavenly Father which prevented his enemies from accomplishing their evil designs against him until the due time had come for his sacrifice to be finished.

JESUS' LAST NIGHT

The minds of the disciples were no doubt unsettled as they assembled in the prepared upper room to partake of the Passover with Jesus. The very air must have been filled with a sense of foreboding and impending tragedy. "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, [Zech. 13:7] I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." (Matt. 26:31) Jesus let it be known that one of them was already plotting to betray

him. He said, "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, [Ps. 41:9] He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." (John 13:18) According to the scriptural account, our Lord was deeply distressed, "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."—vs. 21

Added to all of this witness of betrayal, Luke records, "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." (Luke 22:24) Jesus' answer to his disciples was that the greatest among them would be their servant whereas, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptation." (vs. 28) The Master sensed the hearts of his people as revealed in his conversation with Simon Peter. "The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (vss. 31,32) The apostle's response was positive and, "Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." Matt. 26:35

We recall the words of the prophet (Isa. 53:1-12), as well as Jesus' warning (Matt. 26:31), that all of his disciples would be offended by him that night. The Master then said, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." (Luke 22:34) Later, "the cock crew" (vs. 60) as Jesus had foretold, and "Peter went out, and wept bitterly."—vs. 62

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Later, when Jesus made his way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, his disciples followed with him. He knew that this would be the last night before his death, and that it would be the darkest in all of human history. (Luke 22:53) His heart was full of sorrow and very heavy as he asked Peter, James, and John to accompany him further. "He went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."—Matt. 26:39

The Master had asked his closest followers to tarry in the garden with him, but when he returned to them from praying, he found them asleep. His grief and disappointment is displayed over and over again as he returned to find them asleep a third time, instead of watching with him. "Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." (vs. 45) Shortly thereafter Judas arrived with the armed men who arrested him. "All this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled."—vss. 46-56

TRIAL AND EXECUTION

Various aspects of Jesus' trial are recorded in all four Gospels, and it is without doubt the most significant trial ever conducted in the history of the world. The Sanhedrin was the legal body that was composed of chief priests of the Sadducees, Pharisees and elders of Israel. They proceeded to conduct

a secret court session at night with trumped-up contradictory evidence against our Lord Jesus, the true Messiah that God had sent into their midst.

The Master was bound and hurried off for a hearing before the high priest Annas, who was also father-in-law to Caiaphas, the high priest that year. (John 18:12-14) He was then led to Caiaphas where the chief priests and the whole council sought false witnesses against him. (Matt. 26:57-68) From there, Jesus was taken before the assembly of chief priests and scribes who brought him into the council of Sanhedrin where they quickly demanded his death.—Luke 22:66-71

When the Jewish religious leaders had pronounced our Lord guilty, he was then taken to Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, to carry out the sentence. (Luke 23:1-7) Pilate, however, could find no fault with Jesus and sent him on to Herod Antipas who was the district ruler, or tetrarch. Herod had heard of Jesus and his miracle-working powers and was anxious to see him, but sent him back to Pilate to have Jesus executed. (vss. 8-11) Pilate again consulted with the chief priests telling them that Jesus was not worthy of death. "They cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him."—vss. 18-21

They crowned this king of love with thorns, and spat upon him and mocked him. They made him carry his own cross, and finally 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" written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. (vs. 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.

VIOLATION OF JEWISH LAW

Jesus' hearings, trials, and appearances before the Jewish Sanhedrin and Roman rulers was hurriedly carried out during the darkness of night by the chief priests and religious leaders of Israel. (John 18:28) His death, and the removing of his body from the cross, needed to be accomplished before the special, high holy day which fell immediately thereafter.—John 19:31

The chief priests of Israel had resorted freely to bribery, conspiracy, mob action, and the perversion of judgment and justice in violation of their own law. (Exod. 23:1-3; Deut. 16:19) They bore false witness against Jesus (Exod. 20: 16), demanded his death by crucifixion, and set the murderer Barabbas free instead of our Lord. (Matt. 27:15-26) Furthermore, the Jews had rejected the true king whom God had sent unto them. "It was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he [Pilate] saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar."—John 19:14,15

Jesus knew that it had been the Father's will for him to die, and he gladly carried out that will.

Perhaps he did not fully realize until near the end that his death was to be brought about in such an ignominious manner, and that he would be charged with blasphemy and treason. For one who had done nothing but good, who had honored his Heavenly Father in every thought, word, and deed, these were humiliating charges. He was ready to die as the world's Redeemer, and it was the Father's will that he also suffer.

THE BODY MEMBERS

As members of the body of Christ, it is our privilege to suffer and die with Jesus. When we once again commemorate his death, we will also reaffirm our own determination to follow faithfully in his footsteps. The cup from which he drank is also the cup from which we drink, and the bread which he broke also represents the bread that we partake of.

The suffering of Christ continues in the daily sacrifices made by his followers. "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:5) This has been the manner in which the plan of God has been carried out during this present Gospel Age. Let us rededicate our own lives to follow more faithfully in the Redeemer's footsteps, rejoicing in the privilege of suffering and dying with him in order that we may live and reign with him.—Rom. 8:17 ■

"Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

—Hebrews 9:28