

March/April 1997

In Memory of the Savior's Love

Each year it is our privilege and joy to gather at table of the Lord and in a special way, the way indeed which He Himself appointed, to remember Him. This service of memorial is in itself a simple one but very full of meaning to each who in faith and sincerity takes part. Not only is it an occasion of remembrance of our Savior's life of obedience even unto death and of all that entails not only for us but eventually for all mankind, but a time for review and renewal of our own consecration vows as a sign of our continued willingness and desire to be identified with our Master in daily following Him.

THE UPPER ROOM

Let us briefly recall the events of that final Passover evening which our Lord spent with His disciples nearly two thousand years ago. Along with the women who followed and ministered to Him, and others who had been drawn to this marvelous teacher, the disciples had heard His gracious words, had seen His mighty acts, had marveled as He boldly rebuked the false religionists of His day and had come to realize something of His perfect character. The twelve whom He had specially chosen had sojourned with Him for some three and a half years and had no doubt previously shared with Him in the Jewish Passover service; but this year as the season approached He had been talking of going up to Jerusalem and there being arrested, tried and put to death, but to rise again on the third day.

These sayings were hard for them to come to terms with, as they made ready for what was to be their final Passover with their Master, whose own sentiments are shown in His words recorded by Luke: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say unto you, I will not eat any more thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15,16) This was to be a special occasion, foreshadowing His own death as the Lamb of God, yet our Lord could look through and beyond even that to that great time when all who are truly His will drink with Him the new wine of rejoicing in the kingdom.

THE PASSOVER

As we look back, we see how the beautiful and detailed type of Israel's Passover was about to be gloriously fulfilled in the Lamb of God, in that One in their midst whom the disciples had come to love and respect so much as their Master and Friend. How beautifully; indeed, in all its facets the Passover of Israel pointed forward to "Christ our Passover" as Paul describes our Savior in 1 Cor. 5:7. We note the various features from Exodus 12 -

**The Lamb was to specially selected and must be without blemish. How well this pictures our Lord as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:18,19 - "Forasmuch as ye were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." From the following verse, we note that He was foreordained for this purpose before the foundation of the world in God's eternal plans.

**The lamb was to be slain. We recall the apostle's words in Heb. 9:22 that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" and John the Baptist's words - "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world " (John 1: 29)

**The blood of the slain lamb was to be sprinkled on the lintel and side-posts of each household in Israel to secure the safety of those within - a beautiful picture of the saving and cleansing blood of our Savior sprinkled on the believing heart. Paul tells us that God has accepted us in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption or deliverance through His (Jesus') blood. (Eph.1:6,7)

As for Israel, there is no other place of safety for the Lord's people than "under the blood". Furthermore, while the sprinkling of the blood on the door-posts was important for all the Israelites, it was critical for the firstborn of each household -- it was in fact a matter of life or death for these. This points to believers of this Gospel Age who are spoken of as "first-fruits unto God" in James 1:18 and as the "church of the firstborn" in Hebrews 12:23. These have been called by God for special service and are on trial now for life and the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. If faithful, they are to be "*priests of God and of Christ and reign with Him a thousand years.*" (Rev 20:6)

How fitting then are the apostle's words to the Corinthians and to each of us - "*For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*" (1 Cor. 5: 7, 8) Here Paul points us to the ongoing nature of our feasting upon our Savior, remembering all that He has done for us, especially at this Memorial season but also each day of the year. The Israelites were instructed that at each year's remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt, their children were to have the story of their deliverance recounted to them and the significance of the occasion explained. There was to be not only a remembering of the event but a proclaiming of its meaning.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

So too we pause awhile each year to meditate upon the means of our deliverance from sin and death, upon its resultant blessings, upon our own privileges and responsibilities and to recall again its cost to our dear Savior and our Heavenly Father. To remember Him in the simple way that He set forth was our Savior's specific wish and command and the apostle Paul tells us that each time we partake of the bread and the cup, .which represent His broken body and shed blood, we show forth our Lord's death till He comes. So not only do we remember all that He has done for us, His perfect obedience even unto death, the death of the cross, but we proclaim the grand message of redemption in His blood, eventually to flow on to all people.

As we prepare to partake of what has fittingly been termed "this simple feast" - simple in form but profound in meaning - let us reflect upon the deliverance which it commemorates, upon the privileges of fellowship with our Savior in His death and with others of like precious faith, upon our personal consecration to follow in His steps of obedience, sacrifice and service. Once more we stand, as it were, where our Christian life began - at the foot of the cross of Christ. Again, we confess with the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14)

Our presence with others of the Lord's people on such occasions is firstly an act of loving obedience to our Master, for when He instituted this service of memorial in the presence of His nearest and dearest friends, His clear and loving words to them and to all who have followed after were simple "This do in remembrance of me." There are no penalties set down for not doing so, but there are rich blessings for all who love Him and gladly accept His invitation, and who strive to obey His words in this and in all matters of discipleship. So amid the solemnity of the occasion; there is an inner joy which attends obedience to the will of Him whom "yet unseen we love" and the sense of fellowship in this service with all who are likewise seeking to follow Him.

PARTICIPATION

Our taking part in this service is a recognition of the great price with which our deliverance has been bought, and each of us should be daily mindful of the so great love of God shown in the gift of His dear Son and of the Son's willing obedience. For in a special way, this annual remembrance points us again to the very heart of all God's plans and purposes, to that which is central to the standing in God's sight of every Christian and to that on which the ultimate blessing of all mankind depends. In showing forth His death, we proclaim that we are relying solely and fully on the perfect redemption which by His death our Savior has purchased for us. We are confessing that in ourselves we have nothing to offer to God of our own, there is no other way to Him than the way of the cross and that there is no name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, other than the precious name of Jesus.

But even as we remember His suffering and death, let us not overlook that we are also witnessing a victory. As we read: "and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:8-11. And again: "we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2: 9.

Further, this service unites all who love and trust in the Saviour with Him and all who are His. This is beautifully brought out by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor.10:16: "The cup of

blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." The word translated "communion" has the thought of sharing or participation, and we are reminded that we have the privilege of suffering with Jesus, of taking up the cross daily, having been baptised into the likeness of His death. "To you it is given on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but to suffer for His sake." Phil. 1:29. Paul's great desire was to "know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Phil. 3:10. "It is our privilege also to follow our Savior, to share in His sufferings now and later in His glory, now in obedience and faithfulness, in the age to come in the work of blessing all mankind.

REVIEW AND RENEWAL

As each year we reflect again on the realities which the emblems represent to us in life and salvation, in blessed communion with our dear Lord here and now but even more so when we are changed into His perfect likeness in the heavenly home, who is worthy to come to this table of the Lord? How thankful we may be that it is in His righteousness and by reason of our appropriation by faith of the merit of His perfect sacrifice that we may come confidently in response to His invitation

- "This do in remembrance of me." A life lived to his praise should certainly be our daily objective

but the measure of our attainment is not what is required of those who come to His table.

Personal achievement or worth is not what the apostle is speaking of where he refers to partaking worthily or unworthily; if it were, none would qualify. Rather it is the recognition of our dear Lord's body broken for us personally, our acknowledgment of all that He has done for us that is so important, to see in the emblems what He endured, to confess again our total dependence on Him and the merit of His blood, to appreciate even more fully the gracious call of God to be identified with our Savior and with all His faithful ones now, that by and by we may be glorified together

So as each Memorial season comes around, it is good for us all to review and renew our consecration to follow in our Savior's steps. The apostle's instruction is to examine ourselves and then, in full assurance of faith and renewed commitment to His service, to partake of the bread and the cup gladly and with gratitude, in remembrance of Him. Let us also, as our Savior did on that night so long ago, look forward joyfully to that glorious time when with all God's faithful children we shall drink the new wine of rejoicing with our Master in the kingdom.

JESUS' FINAL HOURS

Some little while prior to the hour of his death, Jesus left the scenes of his usual activities in Galilee, and took his disciples along into the region of Caesarea Philippi -- a town in the Northern district of Palestine, near the foot of Mount Hermon. In the quietness of this countryside retreat, Jesus, for the first time, began to tell his followers of his approaching

death (Matt. 16. 21. Mark 9. 31). During this period of retirement Jesus passed through his wonderful transfiguration experience in the Holy Mount, during which the chosen three disciples saw his glory and heard the other two participants in that glory scene talk with Jesus of the "decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9. 31). Descending from the mountain to the other waiting disciples, Jesus charged the favoured witnesses to tell no man about what they had seen "till the Son of Man be risen again from the dead" (Matt.17. 9).

From that time on, as Jesus returned to Galilee, and then left for the last time those cities wherein his mightiest works had been done to go up to Jerusalem, reference to his approaching death and resurrection fell much more frequently from his lips (Mark 9. 30-32). In spite, however, of these repeated assertions, though at times they questioned among themselves what they might portend, the disciples failed entirely to comprehend what He meant. These frequent references by Jesus, however, show us that the purpose for which He had come into the world was beginning to lie heavily upon his own heart and mind. The hour of his life's mission was fast approaching, but, for all the sorrow it might entail, it was in no fearful mood that He set out to meet it (Luke 9. 51).

SHADOW OF THE CROSS

A very graphic pen-picture is given by Mark (10. 32) of the bearing and reaction, both of Jesus and his followers, as they set out on the last stage of that fateful journey to the mighty events that were to befall during the next few eventful days. "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them.... and as they followed they were afraid". Fear made them hesitant, so that they lagged behind their Master-But He, for whom these moments were so fraught with destiny, "set his face to go up" without hesitation to that ungrateful City which realized not that its own fateful hour also was fast approaching.

The shadow of the Cross lay over the life of the Man of Sorrows, from that moment of glory on Hermon's slopes till He hung between heaven and earth outside the gate and gave, meantime, solemn depth to all his words and eager expectation to his consecrated thoughts. Evidently the disciples could feel the force of this deeper solemnity and eager expectation, for Mark says "they were amazed" as Jesus led them in the way.

COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

While in this exalted mood, there came one-a rich young ruler-to ask Jesus by what means he could attain to eternal life. "Cross-bearing" and self-renunciation had been Jesus' constant theme during all this southward journey from Hermon to Judea. Hence, when this young man, so apparently in earnest, asked so direct a question, Jesus gave him no less direct an answer. "Sell all"- and "surrender all", said Jesus, who was now on the threshold of giving his "all" in death, that others might live.

The young man turned sorrowfully away, unable to esteem "treasure in heaven" as riches preferable to his great wealth. Inwardly sighing as the young man went his way, Jesus

said "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of God "--in other words, How difficult it is for anyone to make the best of both worlds!

Hearing this remark Peter says in effect, Lord, how does this statement affect our position? We have not hesitated to leave all, and follow thee-What shall we have therefore, when the Kingdom, which we preach, is established?" To Peter and his brethren, Jesus then makes reply "No man who has left all-father, mother, wife, children, houses and lands-for my sake, shall lose by his sacrifice; he shall get a hundred-fold in return, and shall most certainly inherit eternal life! Moreover ye which have followed me, in that day of regeneration, when I, as the Son of Man, sit on the Throne of my Glory, shall also each sit upon his throne judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, they, who like the young ruler, have been "first" in this present order, if, entering at all, shall be "last" in the honors of my kingdom, and they that have been "last" (and least) shall then be "first".

This word of assurance must have been encouraging and comforting to his little band of followers. Here was something they could readily grasp and understand. It was not enigmatic and baffling, like the references to his death and resurrection had been. And presumably they talked this matter over, both among themselves and also more privately. Most likely it was the topic of an earnest conversation beneath Zebedee's roof, and as James and John told the story of Jesus and the ruler, a fond and doting mother resolved to ask for her sons a place and position they would scarcely have dared to ask for themselves.

ARE YE ABLE?

Threading her way, one day, through the little group of disciples, accompanied by her two sons, and with some show of respect and deference, she desired the privilege of speaking with Jesus perhaps more privately. "What is your request" asks Jesus. "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left in thy kingdom." (Matt. 20. 21).

Taking the question as the agreed utterance of sons as well as mother, Jesus looks them straight in the face, and through that to the heart, and says, "You know not what you ask! You do not know or realize what is implied or involved in this request! You may have followed me about in Galilee, and in Judea; and you may have left your boats and employment for my sake, but following me means more than all this! As I have of recent days been telling you of my death, and that I have come not merely to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, but to die-to suffer at the hands of cruel men: I ask you now, are you prepared to follow me in all this? Are you able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink of? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I have already been baptized with? Will you follow me through death and humiliation and rejection, and be cut off from your people and kindred?"

"We will follow you even there--we are able!" they replied, thus expressing a deep fidelity to him, and his mission in life. "You shall drink indeed of my Cup-you shall be baptised with my baptism, but even then, I cannot grant your request to sit one on either

side of me—that is not my gift. It is my Father's prerogative to give those positions to those for whom they have been prepared by him" replied Jesus.

"Will you follow me, not knowing what place or position you will get? Will you drink of my Cup, and leave all else to the Father? Can you step out, not minding what your reward will be, only that as you share my Cup of suffering you will also share my Cup of Joy?"

No more penetrating or illuminating words, prior to the moment of this conversation, had any-where fallen from the lips of Jesus. Up in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, some short time before, after Peter had made his memorable, God-given confession 'Thou art the Christ' Jesus had gone on to say "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me" implying that every faithful follower should be accorded the privilege of 'cross-bearing', but never before had He linked his followers with himself in quite the same close, intimate way. "Are YOU able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink of?" Can you drink, as I am about to drink, of a Cup which my Father shall pour?"

DRINKING OF THE CUP

There is no mistaking the implication here. Jesus was reaching the crucial hour, and the accomplishment of the specific purpose for which He had come into this world. At a later time as the weight of tragedy and sorrow pressed more heavily on his sensitive heart, we hear him say, in the very shadows of Gethsemane... "...the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" There is no mistaking what He meant in these decisive words (John 18. 11). Not Peter's sword, nor resistance, nor flight was the way out for him in this hour of darkness. He had come into the world for this hour. He had lived his spotless life, He had faithfully taught the Truth of God and raised the hostility of demons and men—and this was their hour and the power of darkness. But not from them did Jesus accept the issues of that dark hour.

"The Cup, which my Father hath given me"—that was Jesus' view. There were no secondary causes in his life, either in his ingress or egress from this world. And yet again, when the fuller extent of the shame and humiliation that awaited him was opening up before him, in the hour of his anguish, we hear the same truth, and the same whole-hearted submission to the over-ruling hand of a Fatherly providence. "O Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will." Here the bitter cup was at his lip--and He was drinking it to its dregs. This was "the cup that I shall drink." Jesus had lived in the shadow of this hour more particularly from his transfiguration onward, and under its solemn power he had come by stages to Jerusalem and Gethsemane.

Knowing then, in his own mind, the ordeal which awaited him, when his hour should be fully come, we must not fail to note what his question to James and John implies. He had a Cup to drink, which was to be given him by his Father;--and with the deepening sense of all this experience weighing heavier upon him He asks, "Are ye able to drink of the Cup that I shall drink?"