

## THE LAST SUPPER

– MATT. 26:17-30. – MAY 29. –

JESUS and the apostles came to Bethany, near Jerusalem, that they might eat the Passover Supper in the holy city, and that our Lord might suffer at the hands of his enemies, as he had foretold his disciples – that thus he might accomplish an atonement for the sins of the people. His arrival was just a week before his crucifixion. The following day at the supper Mary anointed him. On the next day he rode on the ass into Jerusalem, was not received, wept over the city, and said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." On the following day he visited the temple, driving out the money changers with the scourge of cords. The next day he gave his last public teaching in the temple, declaring himself to be the light of the world. Every night he seems to have returned to Bethany to the house of Lazarus and Martha and Mary, which was also the home of himself and the apostles whenever they were in that vicinity. The next day, Wednesday, the Lord remained in Bethany in retirement, and on Thursday sent two of his disciples to make ready the Passover, which was eaten by himself and the twelve that night – "the same night in which he was betrayed."

The feast of Passover lasted a week, and was one of the most important celebrated under the Jewish arrangement. During that week, leaven, as a type of sin, was carefully put away from all the food and destroyed in every house, in intimation of the holiness and purity, the unleavenness, of the Lord's people – spiritual Israel – typically represented by natural Israel. The whole week was a festival of rejoicing because of God's deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. The feast-week began on the 15th day of the first month, Jewish reckoning, but it was preceded on the 14th by the killing of the lamb, and the sprinkling of its blood upon the doorposts of the houses, as a memorial of what took place in Egypt on the night in which the Lord spared the first-born of Israel under the blood and slew the first-born

of the Egyptians, and thus made the latter willing to let his people go free. It was for the eating of this memorial lamb on the night previous to the beginning of the Passover feast-week that our Lord sent his disciples to make ready, as explained in our lesson.

Luke tells us that it was Peter and John who were sent on this mission, and Mark tells us that they were to know the man at whose house the feast would be held by his carrying a pitcher of water. It has been surmised by some that the house was that of Mark's mother, Mary, and that the upper room thus used was the same one in which the apostles subsequently met and where the pentecostal blessing was poured out upon them. We do know that it was at the house of this Mary that many gathered to pray for the release of Peter from prison. It was a "large upper room" and was already prepared with a suitable dining couch of proper dimensions. It has been surmised that Jesus took this indirect way of indicating the place that Judas might not be informed until the time for the gathering, so that there might be no interruption of the feast and our Lord's subsequent discourses, recorded in John 14:17, on the part of those who were seeking his apprehension. Peter and John made ready the Passover in the sense of furnishing and preparing the lamb, the unleavened bread, bitter herbs and the fruit of the vine, and in the evening at the appropriate time the entire company gathered for the celebration.

### **A LESSON IN HUMILITY.**

Luke only records (22:24-30) that there was strife amongst the apostles on this occasion, though John (13) also implies this. We are not to suppose that the apostles were actuated wholly by ambition and selfishness. We may well suppose that the strife was for position of nearness to the Master because of their love **[R3364 : page 141]** for him. The Lord improved the opportunity to give them a most wonderful discourse, which doubtless lasted them through the remainder of their lives. They had arrived late in the afternoon, over dusty roads, and, not being of the wealthy class, no servants were there

to receive them and to wash their feet; and instead of thinking to do this one for another, to their mutual comfort, they had been striving with one another for favored positions at the table, John evidently gaining the most desired position next to the Master – possibly accorded him because he was not only a relative, and one whom Jesus specially loved, but also because he was the youngest of their number.

The customs of olden times differ from those of the present in many respects. In eating they reclined on a couch surrounding a table. They leaned on their left elbow and used the right hand for conveying food to the mouth; thus their heads were brought comparatively close together, while their feet extended out behind over the couch. Apparently permitting the dispute to run its course and the supper to begin, Jesus arose, and going behind them began to wash the feet of one after another of them. Such a service rendered to **[R3364 : page 142]** them by the Master was of course a severe reproof. They should have thought of washing his feet and each other's and now probably wished that they had done so, but at the time each was apparently intent upon establishing the fact that he was in no degree inferior to the others. They had forgotten so soon the lesson of a short time before – that he who would be greatest amongst them should be servant of all. Our Lord here had the opportunity of illustrating this very matter: he was willing to serve them all, was continually serving them all in the spiritual things, and hence they regarded him truly and properly as their Master; but now he showed them his humility to the extent that he was willing to serve them in the most menial capacity also. Valuable lesson! May it never lose its import amongst the Lord's true followers. Some, however, have erred in supposing that this became an institution or ordinance similar to the Lord's Supper and baptism: to our understanding the lesson to be conveyed by this symbol, and its application to each of us at any time and at any place, would be that we should seek to render some useful service to the brethren regardless of how menial it might be, and that so doing to them it would be reckoned of the Lord as though done unto him.

## **"BETTER THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN."**

It was while they were at supper that Jesus, appearing very sorrowful, gave as an explanation that it would be one of his own chosen twelve that would betray him and thus become accessory to his death – one of those who dipped with him in the dish, partaking of the same supper, the same bread, the same roasted lamb. Then he pointed out that although this was all written, and thus no alteration would be found in respect to the divine plan, nevertheless it signified a very gross breach of friendship – one sad to contemplate. It really made no difference to the Lord, so far as his intention and consecration were concerned, whether he were apprehended by the rulers without any betrayal or whether the betrayal were by a comparative stranger or by a disciple: the fact would make no change in the divine arrangement; but it was a cause for great sorrow that it should be one who had been a bosom friend and disciple.

"It had been good for that man if he had not been born," implies to us that, from the Lord's standpoint, Judas had already experienced so large a measure of knowledge and opportunity for better things that his responsibility for his act was complete, and that there would be no hope for him at any time in the future. We will certainly have no objection to it if the Lord should find some excuse for granting Judas a further opportunity for correcting his character, but we see no Scriptural reason for thinking there will be such further opportunity. From our standpoint it appears as though he sinned against great light, experience and knowledge – contact with the Lord and under the power of the holy Spirit – one of those commissioned to heal diseases and cast out devils in the name of the Lord, and as his representative, and using his power. His end was a sad one: every suicide by his act confesses his wish that he had never been born.

## **"LORD, IS IT I?"**

Another account tells us that each of the disciples inquired of the Lord. "Is it I?" and last of all Judas. The others felt sure that they had

nothing to do with it and wished the Lord to confirm their innocence, and the eleven having asked and no response from the Lord indicating their culpability, the implication would be that Judas was the one; yet such was his spirit of bravado that he also asked the Master, "Is it I?" Jesus answered him, "Thou hast said," or "It is you." How noble was the Lord's reproof; he could have scarcely said less – not a threat, not an imprecation, not a manifestation of bitterness, but merely an expression of sorrow and of pity. What a lesson for us! Our enemies are to be pitied, not hated; to be blessed as far as we are able, but never to be cursed. It is well for all of Jesus' disciples to watch and pray against any Judas-like disposition to sell the Lord or his Truth or his brethren for money or other selfish considerations. Knowing that there will be others of the Judas class, let us guard our hearts and ask, "Lord, is it I?"

While they were eating the Passover Supper prescribed by the Jewish Law, or rather while they were still at the table after they had finished the supper proper, Jesus took some of the remaining bread – which in shape at least more particularly resembled what we today would call crackers – he blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my body." Another evangelist adds, "broken for you." Romanists and some Protestants claim that in consequence of the form of this statement, "this is my body," and the next statement, "this is my blood," we should understand that whenever the memorial bread and fruit of the vine have been consecrated they are changed from being bread and wine and become the actual body of Christ and his actual blood. We dissent from this as being most unreasonable and most untrue; the bread and the wine merely symbolized or represented the body and blood of our Lord. In absolute proof of this note the fact that our Lord at the time he used these words had not yet been broken and his blood had not yet been shed. Hence to have used these expressions in any other way than the way we do use them, namely, as meaning that the bread and the wine *represented* his body and his blood, would have meant to misrepresent the truth – to have falsified; and we cannot perceive that this was done or would have been proper

to have been done by the Lord or any of his followers. [R3364 : page 143]

The bread, as our Lord explained, represented the bread from heaven – his flesh which he sacrificed for the sins of the world. He invites all of his followers to eat of it, and we partake of his flesh when we appropriate to ourselves the blessings, the mercy, the grace secured by the breaking of his body. We thus appropriate to ourselves the benefits of the sacrifice which secures to us the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Father.

### **"THE BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT."**

He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to the apostles, saying, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins." This represents my blood – it will continue to represent my blood with you and with all my dear followers at all times, and will be to you on such occasions a reminder of my death and of the covenant which was thus sealed between God and sinners by myself as the great Mediator between God and man.

The New Covenant or New Testament sealed by the blood of Christ is the one that is mentioned throughout the Old Testament and referred to by the Apostle in his letter to the Hebrews (8:6-13; 10:29; 12:20). It supersedes the Law Covenant. The latter, mediated through Moses, provided that whosoever would do the commandments of the Law should have everlasting life; but the New Covenant provides for mercy, and, recognizing the fact that in our fallen condition we cannot do the things we would, the Mediator of the New Covenant, by his death on behalf of the people, is able to keep Justice whole and yet deal with us according to our intentions instead of according to our actual accomplishments, and meanwhile to lift mankind up, up, up, out of degradation to that plane or condition of being where they will be able to do perfectly all the good desires of true and honest hearts.

The Apostle Paul shows us that this bread and cup had a still further and broader signification. He it was who had so clear an understanding of the "mystery" – Christ in you – that we are members of the mystical body of Christ, participators now in his sufferings, and, if faithful, to be members of his glorious body and participators also in his glory. From this standpoint, as the Apostle explains, the broken loaf represents not only the breaking of the Lord Jesus personally, but the breaking of all his mystical members throughout this Gospel age; and the drinking of the cup was not only his own participation in death that he might thus seal the New Covenant on behalf of mankind, but that his invitation to us to join with him in partaking of the cup, "Drink ye all of it," implied that we could have participation with him in the sufferings and death in the present time – participation with him in the inauguration of the New Covenant conditions during the Millennial reign. How grand is the thought, how deep, how broad! What a wonderful privilege that we should be permitted to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ and to look forward to a participation in his glories in the future. From this standpoint we see fresh force in his word to the apostles noted in a previous lesson, namely, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the [R3365 : page 143] baptism that I am baptized with?" As not every one is worthy to be invited to such participation, so also not every one who is invited will so appreciate the privilege as to participate in this matter joyfully and gratefully. Let us each resolve and say to the Lord, as did James and John, "Lord, we are able" – we are willing. By thine aid we will come off conquerors and more than conquerors.

### **THE NEW WINE – THE JOYS OF THE KINGDOM.**

Our Lord declared that he would no more participate in the fruit of the vine until he would drink it new in the Kingdom. The thought is not that he would drink new or unfermented wine in the Kingdom with them, but that until in the Kingdom the new or antitypical thing represented in the wine would not be fulfilled. When the Kingdom

shall come all the sufferings and trials of the present time will be past, the treading of the winepress, the wine making, will all be over, and instead the wine shall be that of joy and exhilaration, representing the joys and the blessings beyond imagination or expression that will be the portion of all those who truly have fellowship with our Redeemer in the sufferings of this present time and also in the glories that shall follow. The Kingdom time is very close at hand now – certainly 1800 years and more nearer than it was when our Lord spoke these words – and the evidences of its steady inauguration are multiplying on every hand. Our hearts should be proportionately rejoicing in anticipation and we should proportionately be faithful in the present time in the drinking of the cup of sorrow, suffering, shame and contumely, and thus testifying of our love and our loyalty.

Following this was the discourse which has blessed so many of the Lord's people down through intervening centuries recorded by John (chapters 15, 16, 17). Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives – to the Garden of Gethsemane and to fresh trials upon all of the disciples. So it has seemed to us that with every recurrence of the Memorial season, and every fresh symbolization of our pledge to the Lord, come fresh trials, fresh testings, fresh siftings upon the Lord's people. Who shall be able to stand? Let us hold fast the confidence of our rejoicing firm unto the end, hold fast the faithful Word, hold fast the exceeding great and precious promises, hold fast to our Passover Lamb, our Deliverer!

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