

The Lord's Supper.

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The Mosaic law required the observance of various feasts. The most important of these was the Passover that commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The principal incident of the Passover service was the slaying of the lamb, and the sprinkling of its blood upon the door posts, and the lintels of the doors. This sign should distinguish their dwellings from those of the Egyptians. "And the blood shall be unto you for a token upon the houses where ye are, and when I see the blood I will pass over you."

The ritual observances required under the law were shadows of the good things yet to come. The "good things" we have under the gospel. The rending of the costly veil before the Most Holy Place when Jesus died was significant of the passing away of the old covenant. No more blood of bulls and goats, no more offering of lambs for sacrifice, no more officiating priests. Christ the great High Priest has come, "through his own blood" he has "entered in once for all into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption."

The old legal enactments must of necessity cease to be observed. The ancient ritual cannot fit into the new. The need for some ceremonial, however, has not ceased and will not until our present earthly conditions shall have passed away. A simple but expressive ritual has been prescribed by the Lord himself, and given to the church to be jealously guarded, and observed—immersion in water for the regenerate into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and for the disciples, joined in Christian fellowship, the Lord's Supper, in memory of the great sacrifice made in their behalf.

THE NAME.

The name does not matter much. It had almost come to us without any. But for the disorders among the Corinthian believers, we, apparently, should not have had the instructions given us in the 10th and 11th chapters of the 1st Epistle to that church. They have allowed abuses in connection with their feasts that have become a scandal and a shame. "This," the apostle says, "is not to eat the Lord's Supper." He here gives it a name or else employs a term already in use to designate the sacred feast.

TIME OF OBSERVANCE.

The Lord's Supper is committed to the church to be kept within its sacred enclosure, and never to be trampled upon by the feet of the impure and unworthy. To believers it is very much what the passover was to the ancient Israelite, but the time and manner of its observance are not so distinctly marked. The early disciples observed the rite every Lord's day, and many still continue that practice. "As often as ye eat and drink," is the most specific rule as relating to time.

Every gospel church will maintain its observance, and as frequently as may seem expedient, or as circumstances may allow.

A MEMORIAL.

"This do in remembrance of me." The Passover had a similar design. "When your children shall say unto you 'what mean ye by this service?' ye shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when he smote the Egyptians.'"

Our Lord does not want his people to forget him, and in this he is very human. Is it not so with us all? Would it not grieve us to know that we had slipped out the memory of our absent friends? Jesus has left this love token with his disciples to aid their memory. With this they can never forget his loving service,—his sufferings and his death—in their behalf. In that hour of darkness when friends were few, and enemies were many, when the world he came to save was leagued with hell for his destruction, he turns to his chosen few for a sympathy and love that shall not be broken by separation, and through them to all his followers of the coming ages:

"Do this he cried till time shall end
In memory of your dying Friend;
Meet at my table and record
The love of your departed Lord."

Who of all who love Him, would not make the glad response:

"Remember Thee! thy death, thy shame,
The griefs which thou didst bear!
O memory leave no other name
But His recorded there."

A FEAST.

Not in the popular conception of that term. The Israelites, during their journey in the wilderness, had their tables furnished directly from the primal source of supply. There is, at least, no mention made of any secondary causes. The Paulist clothed the thought in sublime imagery. "He commanded the skies above, and opened the floors of heaven; and he rained down manna upon them to eat; and . . . them of the corn of heaven." But that . . . the true life. "My

Father," said Jesus, "giveth you the true bread out of heaven." And again, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven." "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in yourselves. Romanists take these words in their literal sense:

The bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper, passing through the hands of the priest become the real body and blood of the Lord! This doctrine is a "standing article" of their church, without which it could hardly survive. We must not degrade the "body" and the "blood" of this sacred feast into a material substance. The food of which we partake is spiritual. The satisfaction and refreshment that results are spiritual.

"We eat the bread and drink the wine,
But think on nobler good."

This metaphor is not unusual. A good deacon of my acquaintance, who always enjoyed his pastor's sermons, was accustomed to say at the close of the service, "We have had a good feed to-day." He loved the gospel, and could say with the Psalmist

"How sweet are thy words unto my taste!
Ye sweeter than honey to my mouth."

We come to the Lord's table. Before us are the bread and wine. They are simple substances, but consider what they represent! They are symbols of the body and the blood of Jesus; they assist our meditations. They recall the scenes of his passion; they speak of the love of God for men; of the infinite compassion of Jesus; of his cheerful endurance of suffering on our behalf; of his death upon the cross for our redemption. There is a sacred hush upon the place as the emblems pass silently from one to another, telling in sign and symbol the gospel story. The message meets our case for it assures us of the absolute sufficiency of the grace that is promised to every trusting soul. It is a season, all too short, for communion with him who is ever present to fulfil his promise to those who "wait upon the Lord." It becomes a feast of good things, a place for spiritual refreshment, and our hearts sing with C. H. Spurgeon:—

"Amidst us our beloved stands,
And bids us view his pierced hands;
Points to the wounded feet and side
Blest emblem of the crucified.

What food, luxurious loads the board,
When at his table sits the Lord!
The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
When Jesus deigns his guests to meet."

A PROCLAMATION.

I take this word from the revised version. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup ye proclaim the Lord's death." We are not required to commemorate his birth, or his baptism, nor even his ascension, but his death. We must remember Calvary and the Cross. There must be some special significance attached to the death of Christ that gives it the commanding position it is made to occupy. The reason for this stress is easy to discover. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives expression to the following words, "According to law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission." Referring to the High Priest, who entered the Most Holy Place once a year with blood not his own, he adds, "But Christ now once at the end of the ages hath been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." What he meant by sacrifice he had previously explained in his reference to the superior efficacy of the blood of Christ. After showing how the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer availed to the purifying of the flesh, he adds, "How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . cleanse your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?"

Paul taught the churches that in partaking of the Lord's Supper they proclaimed his death. Did he give this a prominence in his own ministry? We may find an answer in a single sentence taken from his letter to the Corinthians; "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;" or this from his epistle to the Romans, "While we were sinners we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son."

Was Peter's preaching in agreement with the proclamation of the Supper? Let him answer for himself—"Knowing that we were redeemed not with corruptible things . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

And what is John's testimony? It is this, The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin. The beloved disciple was permitted a heavenly vision, and heard this refrain from the living creatures and from the four and twenty elders, "Thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

Christ's death upon the cross was not an accident. It was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." This was not the death of a martyr. As Robertson Nicoll has well said, "He died as man, but he died as God." The Lamb of the passover was slain to save the life of the first born of the family. The Lamb of God was slain for the salvation of a sinful world.

Christ could not save men by his perfect life, nor by the mere exercise of mercy. The Lord's Supper pro-

claims salvation by his blood. It would be an unrighteous act to take the life of the innocent in order to save the guilty, but the voluntary offering of one for the sake of another has sometimes been accepted to the satisfaction of the demands of justice. Here in the presence of the bread and wine we see the marvellous act of grace. We are brought to the heart of the gospel, and learn how God can be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.

The Hindus relate a story respecting the origin of a certain spring. In a time of great distress their priests were consulted to show them how to avert the anger of the gods. Their response required the burial alive of a woman of noble birth upon the summit of a certain hill. The victim was found, who for the sake of her people, went cheerfully to her doom; and lo! immediately from her grave poured forth a stream of purest water. The legend conveys an instructive lesson.

In the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah the Messiah is represented as suffering for other's guilt. We turn over a single leaf and we read, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. The fifty-fifth chapter proceeds from the fifty-third."

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

The Lord's Supper is a testimony to a living Christ. The resurrection of Jesus revived the faith of his disciples. Now they can say with an intensity of conviction impossible before "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Before they hoped, now they know."

The rulers congratulated themselves on the successful issue of their schemes; but their triumph was of brief duration.

The mighty results that followed the witness of the disciples to his rising from the dead filled them with dismay. Many since their day have sought to get rid of Jesus. Some have been bold enough to say that Christ is a myth, and to express the hope that the time will come when the gospel story shall be forgotten. What if this should come to pass? Then all hope of a better life would vanish away. The world would sink back into a worse than pagan darkness, and Satan and all his crew would hold high carnival amid the wreck and ruin wrought by sin.

But, thank God, this shall never be, for Christ has risen—he lives and reigns. To this, the Lord's Supper, shall continue its testimony.

As we partake of the sacred symbols we may hear their message, "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea, rather that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God." This truth has its confirmation in the experience of millions who have felt the power of the gospel in their hearts and lives. Apart, however, from all human experience, the Lord's Supper is itself an unanswerable argument to the fact of the resurrection.

There is a delightful harmony in the testimony of the two gospel ordinances. Baptism testifies, concerning Christ Jesus, that he died, was buried and rose again. The Supper shows forth his death and resurrection, and moreover, assures us that those who enter into this mystical union with him shall share his life forevermore.

A SECOND ADVENT.

Through long ages the Passover had been pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt. It was also a prophecy of better things to come. The type must yield to the antitype. Our Lord observed the feast for the last time with his disciple, but he instituted another that should be perpetuated until the close of the age, when the redeemed shall be gathered into the new Jerusalem above. "I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Men may differ as to what shall happen before the Lord's return, but of the fact itself there is no room for doubt with those who accept the statements of the word, untrammelled by theory or speculation. "Till he come," is the apostolic watchword; to be "forever with the Lord" is the believer's most glorious anticipation. "Yea I come quickly," is the Lord's last message to his saints, and they with one voice respond, "Amen, come Lord Jesus."

The lofty mountain peak seems very near to the beholder. There are no intervening objects by which to measure its distance, and one who attempts to reach its base will find that there is more ground to be traversed than he supposed. Thus it has been from the beginning with those who have looked anxiously for the Lord's return. It has not happened as speedily as they expected. But the promise still is good, and to all those "who wait for him shall he appear a second time apart from sin unto salvation."

This shall be their star of hope amid every stormy sea. By and by they shall cast anchor in the haven of their desire.

A GRACIOUS PRIVILEGE.

Grace confers the right to sit at the table of the Lord. Here are no distinctions of caste or rank. Every seat is a place of honor. Here prince and peasant are equal. Here we find companionship with the Apostles and prophets, and with the most godly and heroic of all the ages