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CHAPTER TWO

THE LORD'S SUPPER

ITS ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE

Please Read: Luke 22:14-20; I Corinthians 11:23,28

The slaughter of the lamb in Egypt was a directive of Jehovah to protect the life of His people from His own death march through the land.

The Passover Feast as a festival did not originate that night of the exodus from Egypt. It was a joyous, early spring festival that had been observed by Nomadic tribesmen and agriculturists for centuries before.

On this night, it was given added significance, both historical and prophetic, because it became the Lord's Passover. It was no accident that on the night of the Passover the moon was shining in its full-orbed glory. Travel would have been most difficult for the aged and little ones without the benefit of that desert moonlight.

It is a rewarding experience to review the extraordinary activities of that far-off night. What a striking contrast it proposes! In all the land of the Nile, the solitude of the midnight was rent with mournful wails of woe. The angel of death with stealthy step left in his wake the pale corpse of every first-born in every home in Egypt. While the unmuffled cries of grief-stricken parents filled the land, more than a million refugees

slipped noiselessly from beneath a cross of blood, and by whispered commands they followed Moses, the mighty lawgiver, out on their mission of destiny.

You are familiar with the Bible account of the method of procedure in that first Passover observation. The element of haste and limited facilities rendered the first ceremony a rather simple service.

Among the traditions handed down by passing generations is the story that their fathers departed from Egypt in such haste that they had no time to bake their bread; they had to rely for food upon sun-baked dough which they carried with them.

It is a matter of record that when the Israelites reached Canaan, they conducted congregational Passover festivals as well as family festivals. Many additional trimmings were added by the Jewish people in later years. In fact, some of the pagan practices belonging to the festival prior to the Exodus were revived.

In establishing the pattern of national worship, there were two hours in the day designated and established for daily sacrifice and worship. The morning sacrifice was at nine o'clock and the evening sacrifice was at three o'clock. At the time of the Passover in Egypt, the lamb was slain between three and five o'clock. The blood was caught and sprinkled in the form of a cross above the door, and could be seen from without and within.

You will recall that on Mt. Carmel, the prophets of Baal sacrificed in the morning, and that Elijah waited until the time of the evening sacrifice to make his prayer.

In the laws of cleansing for divers kinds of defilement, the victim, though he had complied with every requirement for his cleansing, was declared unclean until the evening. It is an important truth that all Old Testament sacrifice was of temporary value, and that its efficacy was contingent upon the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on Calvary; neither is it without significance that Jesus died at three o'clock in the afternoon at the time of the evening sacrifice. His quick expiration was a surprise to the soldiers. They had to break the legs of the two malefactors, as was the custom, but when they came to Jesus, He was already dead.

Christ's death at the time of the evening sacrifice justified every worshiper's claim for cleansing, and satisfied their faith for all preceding centuries. "For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." -Heb. 10:14.

REDEMPTION-CONCEIVED AND REVEALED

Herein is validated every claim for cleansing from righteous Abel to the ultimate triumph of every white-robed saint for all the eternal ages.

Justin Martyr, an early Christian writer, writes that a pit was prepared; and, for several hours a fire was kept burning. Two pieces of wood were run through the lamb at right angles, forming a cross, to hold the lamb in place above the hot coals of fire over the pit. The lamb was roasted until it was almost charred black. It was eaten with wine, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. Ten persons were a minimum number to eat one lamb. If one family was not large enough to consume one lamb, others were invited in from neighboring families. Nothing could be left until the morning.

In my search for authentic information concerning the ancient Jewish Passover, I was fortunate to be able to arrange an interview with an old Jewish Rabbi. He seemed amused when I told him I wanted some first-hand information about the ancient festival. As he began to relate the old story, it was clearly evident that he was on familiar ground. Not only did he go into detail, but he played a recording of the Passover Supper, one of ancient form, recorded by a renowned Rabbi, including the songs, the responsive readings, and other parts of the ritual.

As the recorded festival progressed, the old Rabbi's face was a study. He became excited, and seemed strangely moved. The interview stretched into hours, and the account which he gave me has been most rewarding.

CONTEMPORARY PASSOVER PROCEDURE

The narrative or ritual of the Passover as it is now observed is called the *Haggadah*. The entire service is called the *Seder*. The keynote of the Seder service is freedom, and it is marked with special concern and consideration for the children.

A brief resume of current Passover procedure contains elements of timeless significant truths as well as a smattering of tradition and superstition.

On the Passover table is placed the finest family china and silverware. A large platter containing the Seder symbols is placed before the father, or the one who conducts the service. In it are:

1. Three Matzos (three loaves of bread), each wrapped separately in the folds of a napkin.

2. The roasted shank bone of a lamb.
3. A roasted egg, a piece of horseradish, a bit of haroses, and parsley.

There is placed on the table:

1. A plate of bitter herbs, cut into small pieces.
2. A dish of haroses.
3. A sprig of parsley.
4. A bowl of saltwater.
5. A cup of wine at each place.
6. One brimming goblet of wine in the middle of the table.

The custom of providing a large cushioned armchair for the one conducting the Seder is sometimes observed. On this he can recline on his left side, "a position assumed by free men." Some leave the armchair awaiting the coming of Messiah.

There are eleven distinct parts of the ritual. I shall mention a few of the more significant. The middle loaf of unleavened bread, a type of Messiah, is broken; part is eaten at the beginning of the meal; the other part is hidden until last, and through a system of forfeiture, the leader redeems or ransoms the hidden part, and all eat it together as the final part of the Passover ritual.

The first is eaten with bitter herbs; the last part is eaten alone. The service is interspersed with Psalms of deliverance being read responsively or chanted in unison. .

In the center of the table, the glass of wine remains untouched throughout the service. At a given point, the door of the house is opened by the eldest son for Elijah, the herald of Messiah, to enter.

Some of the most prominent symbols are readily seen as pointing to their afflictions and deliverance from Egypt, and typifying some phase of Christ's redemptive work. Others are more difficult and were possibly added by tradition or superstition, and have no particular significance.

At a given point in the Passover service, the eldest son, sitting at the right hand of the father, shall ask, "Father, what meaneth ye by this service?"

The father replies, "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, and delivered our houses." -Ex. 12:26, 27.

REDEMPTION-CONCEIVED AND REVEALED

The ancient Jewish Passover was the preface to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which was so beautifully inaugurated by Jesus Christ on Thursday night in the upper room in Jerusalem following the last Passover with His disciples.

A DUAL SERVICE PERFORMED

Christ's manner of instituting the Lord's Supper immediately following the Passover festival with such smooth transition had posed many questions in my mind until I read the detailed account of the Jewish Sedar Service. I had wondered if the Lord's Supper had to be observed with the fragments of bread left from the Passover, or if the wine was taken from the remains of a container, most of which had already been consumed.

This does not seem to be the case. Jesus took the bread, possibly the half of Matzo that had not been touched, but had been hidden throughout the meal; unwrapped it, broke it, and gave each one, a piece, saying, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." -Luke 22:19.

Each disciple had his own individual glass for the Passover feast; but according to the practice at the time of Christ, there was one large wine goblet in the middle of the table filled to the brim that had not been touched. This glass had been waiting for hundreds of years on every Passover table for the heavenly Herald, and now the hour had come – the door had been opened. Christ must have reached out His hand for the brim-filled glass of the fruit of the vine and held it up to His disciples, saying, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves." -Luke 22:17. "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many." -Mark 14:24.

On the evening before the Passover supper, Jesus commanded Peter and John to make ready the Passover for Him and His disciples. "Where shall we prepare?" they asked. The strange directives of Jesus were like a message in code. "Go ye into the city," He said. "There shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him. . . . Say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us." -Mark 14:13-14.

Why these odd directions? The implications are evident that Jesus had made previous arrangements with this friend for the use of his house. It also seems reasonable that Jesus knew this man intimately, the street he lived on, and in what section of the city he dwelt. If so, why the apparent secrecy in keeping the exact location from His disciples?

There is one obvious answer. Judas Iscariot was listening; this was the night that he would perform his nefarious deed; this was the night that he would lead the officers to make their ruthless arrest. What better place than in a room of a private home where He could not escape? I think that Judas had picked this place for his betrayal, and if Jesus had revealed the location of the house, Judas would have had the opportunity to slip away early and arrange the arrest while they were at supper.

Jesus could not allow this. He must keep Judas with Him until He had completed the duties of that long night. The pattern of the past ages had waited for fulfillment. The whole drama of Redemption was being culminated in the beauty and glory of the detailed transactions of that night. Everything must go according to plan. The devils in hell, with all of their pernicious cohorts on the earth, could not mar the planned unfolding of that final chapter. Jesus himself had set the stage; He was directing every part, and only as He allowed it could the devil move in to execute his foul deed.

Shadowed by the first fall of the evening twilight, Christ and His disciples moved silently and stealthily through the winding streets of Jerusalem. Their sandaled feet shuffled quietly up the stairs; the stillness was broken only by a muffled whisper now and then.

Step by step, the Master performed the Seder ceremony, telling again of the deliverance from Egypt. At the proper moment, someone arose to open the door, as was the custom, for the forerunner of Messiah to come in; but Messiah had already passed through the door; He was already in the room. The door that was opened for Him to come in, served only as a door for Judas to go out into the night.

The last meeting with His disciples was crowded with pathos, was tense with expectancy, and heavy with emotion. At the end of the Passover supper, when Jesus lifted the goblet of wine, the ages parted. There would be no more need for another Passover. Holy history changed its course; and revealed religion entered a new and brighter day.

THE ORDINANCE INTRODUCED BY CHRIST

Christ himself instituted this ordinance. The Lord's Supper and water baptism are the only two ordinances left us to be perpetuated in the Christian Church. In one sense the last Passover brought an end to all types and symbols in religion, and it seems strange that there should be anything of the character of a symbol in the Gospel era.

The Gospel is, of course, that great proclamation of spiritual freedom which terminated all of the ritualistic order of worship pertaining to the old economy. The fact that only two were instituted at the beginning of the Gospel Dispensation would of itself add importance and special significance to their observance.

They are left and should be considered as proclaiming in a tangible way the actualities of all things that we have in Christ. The Lord's Supper has a dual aspect. It is memorial and prospective. It is simply a parable acted out. A parable is a symbol in words.

His gracious invitation to take, eat, and drink was not only for those men who sat around the table on that last Thursday night. He urges that invitation upon us as a sacred duty. "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." -I Cor. 11:25.

Instead of this solemn supper coming to a close in an undertone of despondency, He closes with a triumphant proclamation by saying, "Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." -Mark 14:25. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." -Luke 22:29, 30.

THE SACRAMENT'S HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Many years after the moving events of that memorable Thursday night had taken their place in sacred history, Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, delivered to the Corinthians the permanent formula for the order of the sacrament directly from the Lord Himself. It is not without significance that the

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Apostle, in introducing this order of the sacrament, opened with the reference to Judas betrayal: "That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it." -I Corinthians 11:23, 24. He then gives a detailed pattern of the formula to be followed; the object in view, the blessings attending it, and the promise of its ultimate reward.

The Apostle Paul received this directive from Christ Himself, and its universal practice by the early church is an index to its spiritual value.

In the initial procedure, we have a declaration of the incarnation of the Son of God. It is of special significance that the words, "He took bread," and "He took the wine," are used. It was all voluntary, setting forth again Christ, willingly offering Himself to God.

There is an expression of Christ's perfect devotion to His Father's will. He gave thanks for the bread and wine – a symbol of His body that was to be broken. He was soon to suffer death, and that for His enemies; but He thanked God even for that, because of the ultimate good that would come to a lost world.

In no place is His death as a substitute more aptly underscored than here. When He gave them the bread, He said, "This is my body which is broken for you," He laid down His life voluntarily.

The sacrament holds a historical significance. Paul states that he received it of the Lord, and delivered it to the church.

1. *It is a divine institution*, initiated by the Son of God.
2. *It is a sacrament*, a visible sign of an invisible grace.
3. *It is a covenant*, providing the visible symbols of a New Covenant.

On Mt. Sinai, God marked the Levitical statutes on tablets of stone and entered into a covenant of law with His chosen people. That was a covenant of works. Man broke the law and for long ages brought sacrifices in a vain attempt to mend that law. The ancient sign of the seal of a covenant was the sprinkling of the blood on the contracting parties.

In the New Covenant, God provides the miracle of grace. Under the Old Covenant the law said, "Do and live." Under the New Covenant, grace says, "Live and do."

4. *The sacrament is a memorial*. In, this participation, the disciple says more than "Christ died for the sins of the world." He says, "Christ died for me."

REDEMPTION-CONCEIVED AND REVEALED

The elements that Christ selected for the perpetuation of His memory were common and abundant; the staff of life and the fruit of the vine – bread and wine. If He had selected a rare and costly element, the poor might have been left out. Had He chosen some precious commodity, men might have attributed its efficacy to its natural worth. He selected the common so that it in no way might eclipse God's glory.

There is no efficacy in the bread and wine. Like the river of Jordan to Naaman's leprosy, it was not the water, but the faith and obedience that brought healing. There is no transubstantiation, transforming the wine and wafer into the actual blood and body of Jesus Christ. It is the exercise of faith in the person and character of the One whose death we remember.

PERPETUATED AS A MEMORIAL

Passing the perpetuating of this sacred supper on to His followers, they, from that moment, were no longer servants, but friends. Thus, it becomes the duty of friends to keep alive the memory of those whom they “love and have lost for awhile.”

It should be clearly understood that the Lord's Supper is not a mass; it is a memorial. It is a supper, not a sacrifice. It is a feast, not a fast. It is a table, not an altar. Here, throughout the Christian dispensation, there is no need for a priest to stand officiating between man and God. This sitting together at the Lord's table signifies family relations. It typifies the closest fellowship and communion between friends and loved ones that the common bond of blood can make.

The proper participation and the right attitude in this communion constitute the highest act of divine worship. These elements are sublime in their simplicity. “It was at a table, not a tomb, He willed our gathering place to be.”

The memorial aspect of the Communion is unique. It is customary in memorializing the dead to pass over their death and talk of their life. We commemorate the accomplishments of the good and great in men's lives. It is not considered good taste to speak of the dying hours of a person anymore even in a funeral eulogy. We build monuments to the deeds and exploits of wonderful men; but here it is different. We do not talk of Christ's life as we meet about His table. We do not sing of His incarnate existence as we prepare for His communion.

We do not preach about what He accomplished in life as we approach the elements prepared for us. We think, talk, preach, and sing about His death. It is His death that He wants us to remember. It is Calvary that we must never forget. It is the stripes on His back, the nail prints in His hands, the spear wound in His side, the thorny crown on His brow that let the blood flow for the remission of sins; it is this aspect of His Redemption that we meet about the table to memorialize.

In His death, He was pleased to give Himself for us. In the faithful observance of the Communion, He is pleased to offer Himself to us. Take this wine and drink ye all of it, He said. Take this bread and eat ye all of it; the wine is my blood; the bread is my body. Do not take it and wrap it in a napkin and lay it aside. Do not carry it about with you. Do not set it up as a kind of idol and worship it. Eat it; it is my body and my blood.

Notice that at this time He had not offered His body nor shed His blood, and therefore it could not follow as the Roman Church teaches, that it would, in the eating, actually become His shed blood and broken body.

Is it not strange that He did not authorize His followers to commemorate His birth, His temptation, His miracles, His resurrection, or His ascension? It was His death that He chose for us to remember. His death is the heart of Redemption. Between the Cross and the second coming of Christ to this earth again, we have the Communion table.

Every time the Communion is observed, we are showing forth in the most emphatic manner the Lord's death until He comes. Around the table, the universal aspect of Redemption gives way to the personal. "Christ gave himself a ransom for many," "For God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," is the universal language of Redemption.

PERSONAL LANGUAGE OF THE COMMUNION TABLE

Christ died for me, is the personal language of the Communion table. It is interesting to remember that during the Last Supper when Jesus said, "One of you will betray me," that everyone of the disciples said, "Lord, is it I?" underscoring the individual relationship of each one to Jesus.

When we partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper, we are saying in unmistakable language that Christ's death took away our sins, and that we are expecting Him to return again that we may share with Him the new wine in the coming Kingdom.

One of the most attractive features of the Gospel of the Kingdom is the frequent references to feasts and banquets, all of which point to the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when they shall come from the East and West, the North and South, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the sainted souls of history.

When we take the Communion, we are not only joining the myriad millions who for two thousand years have perpetuated this solemn memorial; we are paying tribute to Christ through a ritual that will be celebrated long after this world has gone through the fire of God's judgments. For we read the great theme of the angels' song that will resound through the ivory palaces of that Celestial City: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength, and honor and glory and blessings."

Thus, the memorial service that has been kept alive through time will be continued throughout unnumbered ages, and both men and angels, cherubims and seraphims will mingle their voices in praise at the Lord's table as long as eternity rolls.

*I remember how my Saviour died for me
On the rugged Cross of dark Mount Calvary;
I remember how He cried,
How He bowed His head and died,
I remember dark Calvary.*

*I remember how He blessed and broke the bread;
"Signifies my broken body," thus He said;
Broken on the cruel tree,
Hanging there for you and me,
I remember dark Calvary.*

*I remember how He blessed the cup of wine,
That which is the precious fruitage of the vine;
"O this is My blood," He said,
"And for many it was shed."
I remember dark Calvary.*

THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Just remember how they pierced Him in the side,
From which flowed the precious healing, cleansing tide;
It was shed for you and me,
That from sin we might be free.
I remember dark Calvary.*

*I remember how He paid the debt for me,
How His blood was shed on dark Calvary;
O the blood of Calv'ry's brow,
I can see it flowing now.
I remember dark Calvary.*

