

Keeping the Feast

Speaking of the inauguration of what we call the Breaking of Bread meeting of the disciples, the Master said: “with great 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” (Lu. 22:15). And at this same time, Messiah revealed that not all who professed to be followers of Him were true. The account in Matthew records him as saying: “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” To which the disciples responded by being “exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him: Lord, is it I?” (Mat. 26:21-22). So it was, that being ever aware of the weakness of the human constitution and it’s natural bias against the things of God, the disciples did not rule out their own selves in this matter. Notice, none of them said “is it him,” referring to another, but “is it I” referring to each one of themselves individually.

The apostle Paul picks up on this, in relation to the continuance of this regular feast of believers: “as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come ... but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and so let him drink of that cup” (1 Cor. 11:26,28). Before partaking of the emblems of Messiah’s offering himself up as a perfect sacrifice, we must “examine” ourselves, and recognise our own individual needs before Him.

In Luke 22 that we began with, Christ referred to his memorial feast as a “Passover”. This is again picked up by the Apostle in the New Testament reading for the day, in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. And again, the context is of discernment, determining that which should find no place in such a feast:

“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. 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).

Christ therefore is our “Passover”, and in a sense, the memorial feast that we keep is a partaking of this Passover. And the same principle applies: we must not keep the feast with “old Leaven”, but must rather cast it out. The allusion is clearly to Exodus chapter 12, where we again have this reference to “keeping the feast”:

“this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to Yahweh throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever” (Exod. 12:14).

Notice another link with our breaking of bread meeting; the Passover was to be a “memorial” of Israel’s departure from Egypt involving the shedding of the Lamb. Just like they, we must continually be mindful – and memorialise, our redemption from bondage to sin, being “translated into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). It was also a time for the casting out of leaven:

“Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel” (Exo. 12:15).

In all of these things, when considered, we have a powerful association of ideas, which should collectively influence our standing before our God, and our involvement with the death of

Christ. Our weekly memorial celebrates the great sacrificial work of our Redeemer, but there are conditions imposed and our acceptability or otherwise depends upon our meeting those conditions. We need to cast away “leaven” as did Israel, under threat of being “cut off”. But what do these things mean? What is meant by “leaven”? It is plain that it is not the literal substance (yeast) that is being referred to, since it is written that “meat commendeth us not to God ...” (1 Cor. 8:8). Again, our Master taught a similar principle to his disciples:

“take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Mat. 16:6).

When he spake thus, his disciples took him literally, and assumed he was referring to one of the physical ingredients of bread. After the Master corrected them however, “then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Mat. 16:11).

CASTING OUT THE LEAVEN

This is the true import of what we are being taught by both Messiah, and his Apostle, Paul. It is impossible to acceptably partake of the Memorial emblems at the same time as holding the false doctrines of the world in which we live – modern day Pharisees and Sadducees. We must cast such out, as if it were a contaminating influence – which of course, it truly is. Hence the Apostle concords as cited above, in saying: “purge out therefore the old leaven ... let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness” (1 Cor. 5:8). The weekly feast which we partake of each week are “love feasts” (Jude 12) and true love finds no place for “malice and wickedness”. Rather, we are to unite together in a common need, and love for the principles of the Truth, that we see worked out in the sacrifice of Yahweh’s dear Son.

This aspect of partaking of Spiritual Food comes out elsewhere in Scripture, not only in the direct context of the Passover. The Psalmist gives the exhortation:

“O taste and see that Yahweh is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him”
(Psa. 34:8).

Again, Peter is inspired to pick up the sentiments of this passage later:

“as newborn babes, desire the unadulterated milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet. 2:3).

Here, we see the responsibility of newly baptised members to seek after the basic principles of the Word, earnestly desiring them, as a newborn babe yearns for his mother’s breast. Tasting that the good Lord is gracious, he develops a taste for the world – for the principles of Truth that constitute the Righteousness of the Lord which we must each seek.

But as the believer matures and grows in faith, there is the need to continue feeding richly upon the Word, as a growing child moves onto solid foods. So it is written elsewhere: “everyone that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But solid food (Greek) belongeth to them who are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:13-14). The exhortation is plain: the Inspired Word of God contains both milk to provide for newborn babes, and solid food to meet the maturing disciples need, to learn to discern between good and evil. And so discerning, he must cast out the old leaven, and seek to present himself before the Lord as part of a “new lump”.

THE FOOD OF THE OFFERING

A similar principle is contained in the Mosaic sacrificial code. Under the Law, there were only two types of sacrifice that the offerer himself could partake of: the Passover, and the Peace offering. The language used of the Peace offering helps us to understand the spiritual significance of this:

“... the priest shall burn it upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire unto Yahweh” (Lev. 3:11).

Again:

“ ... the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour ...” (Lev. 3:16).

The fact that the burning animal parts are described as being “the food” indicates that the whole affair was a meal – a meal of fellowship with Yahweh, in which Yahweh was served first, then the offerer could take his share. This is further reinforced in that when reproving Israel, Malachi referred to the Altar as being the “table” upon which food was presented:

“... ye offer polluted bread upon my altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say The Table of Yahweh is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?” (Mal. 1:7-8).

Here, Israel were offering imperfect sacrifices upon the Altar, animals which were blemished and which they would be glad to be rid of. But in so doing, in offering to Yahweh polluted food, by their actions they said, “The Table of Yahweh is Contemptible”. They ought to have been discerning between good and evil, but instead they chose to offer a blemished meal before the Lord of all the earth, and keep the best for themselves. They polluted “the table of the Lord” by making provision for the flesh.

This phrase “table of the Lord” is taken up again by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 10:21, speaking of the table upon which our memorial emblems are placed – the positioning of “Christ our Passover”:

“Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:21).

Notice, that yet again, the context is to do with discernment – a distinction being made between the Lord’s table, and the table of demons – with no fellowship being possible between the two.

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

When we come therefore, to consider the offering up of Messiah as a sacrifice to bear away our sins, in him “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” (Heb. 13:10). Being a priest after the order of Levi did not confer a legal entitlement to partake of the Christ-altar which we partake of each week. Such an altar as this needs to be approached and partaken of in faith and discernment. Feeding upon the flesh and blood of Messiah in the emblems upon the table, we discern the Lord’s body, and express our desire to be part of his offering. Indeed, this we can do, for just as the Peace

offering was placed on top of the Burnt offering, even so we offer the sacrifice of praise upon the basis of the sacrifice of Messiah:

“by him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name” (Heb. 13:15)

The “sacrifice of praise” referred to here was one of the Peace offerings ordained under the Law. Each week we come together to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5), to fellowship each other in the partaking of the emblems which speak of Christ our Passover, and the singing of hymns, that we might give the fruit of our lips as an acceptable sweet savour to Yahweh. Let us therefore feed richly upon the peace offering of Yahweh’s providing, seeking to build up ourselves in our most holy faith, seeking to cast out the leaven of malice and wickedness, and rather look to our own selves that we might not partake of these holy emblems unworthily.

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