

Sunday Morning No. 283

Our presiding brother has remarked that great things centre in the ordinance of the breaking of bread which we have met to observe. How true is this: how much more true than we at all times realise. Let us spend a few moments in trying to do so. Everything depends upon our taking a right view of the matter, as regards beneficial results or otherwise. If we see only the bread and the wine, we see nothing. If we see only Christ crucified, we do not see much more. There are elements of palpability and of public reality involved in this matter that give great mental strength when they are fully in view, and in the absence of which, we are liable to feel as if the breaking of bread were a sentimental individual affair which is snuffed out by the reality of things when we go out into the street.

Let us consider. We have been reading of the institution of the supper by the Lord before his death, at the eating of the passover with his disciples. At the first institution, 12 men of humble social rank sat round the table with the Lord: men who were fishermen—men who were “unlearned and ignorant,” according to the educational standard of the day (Acts 4:13). Looking abroad upon the world of the present hour, contemplating the features of the public life of the age, what do we see? That the names of these men stand on the forefront of the affairs of mankind. You look at London, the greatest city of the world: its chief building is St. Paul’s—not that Paul was one of the 12, but he was added to the apostolic band soon afterwards. You cast your glance across Europe to the city that has filled the largest place in history—Rome—and you see St. Peter’s. You wander through the cities of the civilized world, great and small, and you find the names of John, and James, and Philip, and Jude, and Luke, and Bartholomew, &c. Here is this institution which we to-day observe in obscurity interwoven with public life out of doors, in so far as the names of the men present at its first observance are associated with the public buildings of the day. No hole and corner affair is this you see. A very public matter it has become. The question is, how has it come to pass? By what extraordinary ladder of circumstances have the names of men who were nobodies in their day, climbed out of the ditch of obscurity to the highest pinnacle of public notoriety? When we get a reasonable answer to this question, we have Christ risen and Christ working miracles through the apostles by the power of the out-poured Holy Spirit; for, apart from the apostolic testimony to Christ’s resurrection, and the divine confirmation of that testimony in signs, and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:4), it is not possible to account for the ascendancy acquired in the Roman world in the first century by the name of a carpenter crucified as a felon with the consent of the Roman governor of Judea. What this involves for us at the present moment we know: if Christ rose after his crucifixion, then Christ lives now, and knows all about us, and will come again and reward faith and works performed in his name while he is away.

Then, take it in another way. We have said it was at the passover that this supper was instituted. Now, what is this passover? It is observed every year at the present day by the Jews in every land; and has been so observed from time immemorial. “Oh yes,” say people, lightly; “a feast of the Jews: we know: nothing more: there is nothing in it than that.” Wait a moment. Whatever is in it or not in it, observe that this passover is still observed by a nation scattered in all the world: so that again, in this breaking of bread, we are associated with out-of-door world-wide public events of the present hour. How long has this feast of the passover been observed annually by the Jews? A very long time: for here we have nearly 2,000 years at a stride as we look back to the Lord and the disciples eating the passover in Jerusalem in the early part of the first century. How long before then had the Jews been observing it? The

Old Testament part of the Bible gives us the clear answer to this question; and you know, there is no doubt about the reliability of that answer: for the Lord said, “The Scriptures (of Moses and the prophets) *cannot be broken*, ” and his resurrection compels us to receive his statements as true. What is that answer? That the Jews have kept the passover ever since Moses was with them, about 1,500 years before the days of Christ. Now, why have they kept the passover for over 3,000 years? What is the meaning of it? The meaning is explained every time the feast is kept in every company of Jews in every country. Moses left them a form of words to recite always on these occasions. The youngest Jew present was to say, “What mean ye by this service? And the answer of the elders present was to be, “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 Egyptian (first-born) and delivered our houses.” This is what the Jews have been saying to each other for over 3,000 years. They said it while Moses was with them during the latter 40 years of his life: and they have said it ever since, generation after generation. What follows? That the passover is a monumental evidence that God brought Israel out of Egypt by the miraculous interposition recorded—of which the death of the first-born in every Egyptian house was only the last, unless indeed we reckon the overthrow of Pharaoh’s host in the Red Sea as the last. For, mind you, it is not conceivable either that Moses would have made them say such a thing if it was not true or that he could have compelled them to consent to say it if they knew it was not true.

So that here is this breaking of bread going, not only out of doors to matters and forms of public life in the passing hour but into the remote past, and linking with the most stupendous occurrences of history.

Observe what comes out of this: if God was at work with Israel in the beginning of Israel’s history, He will work with them at the end: for He has said that He will again show marvelous things to them, “according to the days of their coming out of the land of Egypt,” and that the nations will see and be confounded, and become servants of Israel (Mich. 7:15–16: Isaiah 60:12). His object in the Egyptian work, He said, was that His existence might be known to Israel and the Egyptians and to all the earth: His object in the latter-day resumption He declares to be that the world may know Him again after a long period of forgetfulness, and that the earth may be filled with His glory (Ezek. 39:21: Isaiah 11:9).

Epochally connected with the exodus celebrated with the passover are the two songs of Moses. Both are powerfully confirmatory of the lesson of the passover and go forward to the future in which we have become interested through Christ. The first was sung by the Israelites after their passage through the opened Red Sea, in which the Egyptians were drowned (Ex. 15.) The second was not sung but written, 40 years afterwards, by God’s command, and deposited with the priests to be God’s witness against Israel in all succeeding generations. God told Moses (Deut. 31) that after his death, Israel would depart from the law delivered to them, and would fall into great trouble in consequence, and that they incline to put the blame on God. He therefore desired to put on record his anticipatory explanation and prophecy. The song is a depreciation of Israel’s character, and a prediction of the unutterable evils that would befall them in their national experience, because of their forsaking of God. There is no more overpowering evidence of the divinity of Israel’s history than the presence of this writing in Israel’s Scriptures: for on no human hypothesis that the utmost ingenuity can invent can its presence there be accounted for—even if the outrageous suggestions of the “Higher Criticism” were conceded to the full. This memorial and prophetic song concludes with an intimation that in the end, when Israel will have learnt the foolishness of all departure from God, God will be “merciful to His land and to His people.” What this means, we fully

learn from the glowing delineations of Isaiah 60. Zion, downtrodden in the dust for ages, will arise and shine at the rising of the mercy of God upon her. The Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising. The wealth of every land will be placed at her disposal. In His wrath, God has smitten her, but in His favour will He have mercy upon her. The nation and kingdom that will not serve her shall perish. Whereas she has been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through her, He will make her an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations. Her sun shall no more go down. The Lord will be to her an everlasting light, and the days of her mourning will be ended. Her people will be all righteous, and will inherit the land for ever.

The particulars supplied by Jesus and the apostles connect our individual salvation with this consummation. At the very table where the supper was first instituted, the Lord said to the apostles they would be with him then, “sitting on twelve thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Jesus had previously told them this would be “in the REGENERATION when the Son of Man should sit on the throne of his glory” (Matt. 19:27), and that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets would be prominent in the kingdom, and strangers from all countries would come and sit down with them, and shine forth in the glory of an immortal nature (Matt. 13:43: Luke 20:36: 1 Cor. 15:53). On all these things the passover lays hold, which Jesus said would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

Thus this breaking of bread by itself and in its association with the passover, stretches both to a remote past and a stupendous future, while entwining itself with the public life of the present hour. What strength these true and powerful thoughts impart. How they enable us to bear with comparative equanimity the social degradation springing out of our submission to the truth, in its doctrines, precepts, and ordinances. A constant and full view of them would preserve us in a perpetual mood of satisfaction and joy. Substantially, and in the underlying currents of the mind, this is undoubtedly their effect. But in the weakness of mortal nature, and amidst the evils to which we are exposed in the present state of things among men, we are liable to experience seasons of depression and sorrow. Well, for this also, the readings of the day supply a balm. It is a curious but a true balm. It is the balm of a sorrowful psalm.

We have read the 69th psalm, which is a psalm of deepest dolefulness. “Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying. My throat is dried: mine eyes while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head. They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty. Then I restored that which I took not away.”

At first sight, it might seem as if there could be no consolation for us in such an outpouring of grief. We get it by considering who it is that speaks these mournful words: and why God should permit, and even contrive, such painful experiences for those whom He loves. There is a double authorship in the words. David is the actual writer, but we know from express testimony that he “spoke by the Spirit,” and that much of what he said was concerning Christ. Whether we understand them of David or Christ, the reflections arising out of them are the same: for David was “a man after God’s own heart.”

If David and Christ, the beloved of God, have tasted so deeply of the cup of bitterness, does it not help us to reconcile ourselves to a similar experience when it comes to our turn?—even if we had no explanation of its object, surely. But we have an explanation. It is with a view to a certain mental result, which Paul describes as being “partakers of holiness.” There

have been countless millions of human beings upon the earth who are of no value to God except as creatures serving a temporary purpose. A few among them are precious to God. Why? In most points they have resembled the rest: hearts pump, lungs breathe, brains vibrate: what is it that so distinguishes them from the bulk of mankind as that God should say, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." It is *a certain state of mind* having relation to HIMSELF. "To this man will I look who is humble, and trembleth at my word." "The Lord hath chosen *the man that is godly* for himself." "All the wicked of the earth he putteth away like dross."

Now, in the generation of this state of mind, trouble has an important place. When men are well off, they are liable to forget God. We see it among wealthy people. They are too much pre-occupied with their own importance and their own pleasure to give God His place. It was so with Israel. When "Jeshurun waxed fat," he "forgot God that formed him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his Salvation." In trouble, men are led to think, and are more capable of seeing things as they really are. Things as they are, are different from things as they seem to a man in prosperity. To such a man, nothing seems to matter except the affairs that affect *him*, whereas if he could see himself, he is only a lump of stuff favourably envired for feeding—like a fat snail on the right tree: of very little consequence in the wide scheme of things, while he lives, and of none at all, when his juices dry up and he vanishes. Things as they are, are things as they seem to God—the centre, the fountain. Men to become wise have to learn this point of view: and where trouble helps is that it aids us in the quenching of ego and in the discernment that we are nothing except as God permits, and that all that we can ever become or possess is the blossom of God's own power and goodness—to whom, therefore, and "not unto us, is glory due." When men are thus reasonably humbled in their own eyes, with pride crushed, and mercy quickened, and God glorified in the innerman, men are fit for the divine use and safe to be endowed with the utmost wealth of divine goodness. This is why the way to life is for the time being a way of suffering. We would not choose it: but God will take care that we have it—in the due form and measure that He sees to be necessary. We may be tempted sometimes to think that we could do (spiritually) without it, but we shall not be allowed to forget that "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." There is nothing left for us but to give in, and take Peter's advice: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time."

That exaltation is never very far off, because we cannot in any case live beyond a certain few years, and in death there is not a moment's conscious delay. But we have special cause for hope in the day in which we live. For many years, we have been looking for the downfall of the Turkish empire, because that has stood on record for 1800 years as the revealed prelude to the thief-like coming of the Son of Man. We have seen it crumbling year after year for many years, as the figure of a drying river required: but we are now on the verge of seeing the process completed in the military overflow of the northern Power upon the exhausted empire. . . .

It is evident that the end is closing in upon us. It is ours, not only to lift up our heads as Jesus recommends in presence of the accomplishing signs, but to bear with patience the evil to which we are still in subjection, knowing that if we allow affliction to have its intended work, the end will be peace and joy for evermore.

(Taken from *The Christadelphian* 1897 by Bro. R. Roberts.)

