

Christian Holidays #6

by: Ronald L. Dart

Sometimes the simplest answers are the best! I've asked again and again why is it, 30 years after the ascension of Christ, long after everything was nailed to the cross that was going to be nailed there, why it was that a Gentile church was observing the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread that goes along with the Passover? Well, the simple answer is, because the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are all about Christ!

It was Paul who said it, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he said in First Corinthians 5 and verse 6, "Your boasting isn't good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Christ is Our Passover

All of the commentators who have studied this carefully, understand that the season in which this letter was written was the Passover season. They see quite clearly that Christ is our Passover. This is what Paul is saying, when he says, "Let's celebrate the feast", or as the King James Version says, "Keep the feast," he's talking about the feast of unleavened bread. There is absolutely nothing else there to talk about.

So the Corinthian Church was observing this time. According to Paul, the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are about Christ.

Wine is the Symbol of Christ's Shed Blood

But how so? Well I doubt that there is a Christian in the world that doesn't understand that the wine taken in communion, or the Lord's Supper, symbolizes the shed blood of Jesus. We all know that Jesus died for our sins (1 John 1:7, 1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Peter 3:18, . We sing hymns about the blood of Jesus. They are all shot through our hymnals.

The wine, the symbol of Christ's shed blood, is only half the Lord's supper.

What About the Bread?

What about the other half? What about the bread? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 26 verse 26, "When they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is My body."

Later, when He had taken a cup and had given thanks He gave it to them and said "Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." So we understand that the blood is for the forgiveness of sin and the bread is His body, but what does that mean?

Well in the account in Luke, it's a little different, it says, "When he had taken bread and given thanks, He broke it and he gave it to them saying," this is in Luke 22 verse 19, "This is my body which is given for you; This do in remembrance of me." And He took it a step further, so His body is given for us. What does that mean? We know how He gave His blood. We know what it means.

How did He give us His body? Well, returning to later in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He says this in chapter 11 verse 23 "Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me."

So, the unleavened bread of Passover represents the body of Christ, given for us, broken for us. But why was this necessary? Why wasn't the blood enough?

Examine Yourself

Well, there is a suggestion of what is at stake in the comprehensive description of the Christian Passover that you find in this 11th chapter of First Corinthians. In verse 27 Paul says this, "Whosoever therefore shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." When he uses the word unworthily, he's not talking about whether you're worthy or not, he is talking about the manner in which we do it.

"But let a man examine himself, and let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep or have died."

You know, there's no getting around Paul's intent here. He connects the failure to distinctly understand to discern the Lord's body with sickness and even death. But why? What does it mean?

Faith and a Hole in the Roof

Well, there's another incident in the ministry of Jesus that sheds some light on this mystery. It is found in the second chapter of Mark. Jesus had come into Capernaum and He was teaching in many places, and He was being thronged everywhere he went. On this occasion He got together in a house, He couldn't find room in most places, but in this case He was in a house. There was no room in the house for anybody else, not even near the door and people were standing outside the door trying to listen and no one else could get in.

Along came four guys, carrying a litter with a man who is paralyzed and couldn't move. They couldn't get to Jesus but they knew that if they could and if He could just touch this man, the man would be healed. But they couldn't get in.

Meanwhile, Jesus was inside teaching the men who were gathered around Him and while He sat there teaching, dust started coming down from the roof, from the ceiling, and there was a scratching and noise and everybody looks up and all of a sudden, tiles start breaking loose and a hole appears in the roof. The hole gets bigger and bigger, and finally they actually begin to let down in front of Jesus the litter on which this paralyzed man was lying.

Jesus, I think, was astonished as much as everybody else that was there. He was really amazed at the degree of persistence that their faith exhibited on this occasion, and He saw their faith, and He said to the man that was lying in front of him on this litter that was let down before his eyes "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus Has Authority to Forgive Sin

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and they looked at one another and said, "What's He talking about? He's blaspheming. Nobody can forgive sins. Only God can forgive sin." Well, Jesus was aware in his spirit that they were reasoning that way, and He said "Why are you thinking this way in your heart? Which is easier for me to do, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven', or perhaps I could say, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

"Which is easier? But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I'm doing it this way because I want you to know this, that I have the authority to forgive sins."

Where did he get that authority? Well, Jesus said, "So you can know this, He turned to the paralytic, and said, "Rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he arose immediately and took up his pallet and he went out of the sight of all of them. I guess they found a way for him to get out the door and everybody was amazed and glorifying God and said, "We have never seen anything like this."

No, I don't suppose they had, but this astonishing example of healing may be the most revealing of all the miracles that Jesus did.

Sickness and Sin

So what is it about this astonishing example of healing, in the case of the paralytic, that is so revealing? Well, it reveals an unexpected connection between sickness and sin. Now this is not to say that a person who is sick is a worse sinner than a well person. Nothing could be further from the truth. It does not draw any direct line between sin and disease in the individual. In other words, if you're sitting there reading this article and you are sick, you cannot put your finger on some sin of yours or your parents that actually caused this disease that you're suffering from. That said, it does suggest that sickness and disease are in the world because of sin and the healing of disease involves the forgiveness of sin at some level. We may not understand all there is to it, but Jesus made the connection, and we have to deal with it.

Jesus' Last Passover

Now when Jesus came to the last supper, the last Passover of His life, He came with some unfinished business in hand. In Hebrews 4 and verse 14 it says this of Jesus, "Since, then, we have a great high priest who is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let's hold fast to our confession, because we don't have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

On this last night, there were ways that Jesus had not yet been tempted. There were temptations that are familiar enough to all of us that Jesus had not faced. Jesus was not merely to die for our sins, He was going to suffer for them as well, and in ways that you and I might overlook.

The whole process of suffering began with a tragic act of betrayal. The story of Judas Iscariot is familiar to all of us (Luke 22:3-6). You know you can't be betrayed by your enemies. It's only your friends that can do that and it hurts. You know how it hurts to be betrayed by a friend and this was a great part of what Jesus had to deal with.

Looking back on it, Satan himself betrayed the Father, it was a betrayal of the highest sort, of one who was the very closest to the throne of God, and yet he was a betrayer. And now at the end of Jesus' ministry, Satan enters into one Judas Iscariot, and He betrays Christ.

Garden of Gethsemane

Knowing what lay ahead of him, Jesus took His disciples with him to the garden of Gethsemane that night to pray. The Passover supper had been finished. What it meant was about to begin.

When in Gethsemane, we get a look at the heart and soul of Jesus, a more intimate look into Him, who He is and what He was doing more than we get anywhere else.

Mark's account in chapter 14 and verse 32, says this, "They came to a place named Gethsemane, and He said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. He was torn up inside. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Stay here and watch." He went a little ways beyond them. Another account says about a stone's throw, and "He fell on the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, that this hour might pass him by."

You know, I think sometimes, we think this was easy for Christ. After all, He was God. He knew what was going to happen. He knew He would die. He knew He would be raised from the dead, and surely, He could sail through this. No, apparently not.

Because He began to pray that He wouldn't have to do it. And as He was saying, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me, yet, not what I will, but what You will." He came back and found the disciples asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you watch for one hour with me?" Here He is in this circumstance and being let down by His friends. But you know no one can really understand what you are going through.

The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.

Jesus said, "Keep watching and praying, so you don't come into temptation."

And again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came back and found them asleep. They really wanted to stay awake, but they couldn't and they didn't know how to answer Him.

Switching to Luke's account in chapter 22 and verse 43, "Now an angel from heaven appeared to him strengthening him." Have you ever thought about this, that it got so bad, that the struggle inside Jesus, the fear of what He was about to undergo, was so great, and the temptations so great, that God had to send a angel to Him to strengthen Him. The outcome was in doubt!

"And being in agony, He prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground." Think about that.

Jesus Knew Fear

I don't know if Jesus was that afraid of death, but death was not all that He faced that night. Jesus, on this night, knew fear. He knew the kind of fear that you and I face in our lives. He faced the betrayal of a friend closer than a brother. He faced being forsaken by all of His friends and being left entirely alone. One of these fellows ran off in the night naked leaving his clothes behind.

He faced humiliation, mocking, degradation by His captors. He faced false accusers and lying. People would step right up, look Him in the face, and say, "He's the man, he did this," and lie in their teeth. Boy, it hurts when people do that to you. Doesn't it?

Haven't we all experienced people lying about us. He faced a terrible beating and a lot of pain. He faced scourging, one of the worst forms of physical torment that the Romans could devise. And then, He faced long hours on the stake, the cross, in agony the whole time. And because it was necessary that He suffer, He would refuse the narcotic that they offered Him at the moment of crucifixion. He would refuse it until just before the very end. Why?

Jesus Tempted in all Points

Well, because in one way or another, all of us face humiliation, degradation, lying, false accusations, betrayal, being forsaken by our friends, and it was necessary that Jesus be tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

We have to at different times in our lives look forward to nothing but pain and suffering as we struggle with the disease that is going to take our life. In the end we know that we are going to die, and yet we fight, we struggle, we endure the pain. Sometimes, in the hope of staying alive, we endure tortures that would make a medieval torture camp look pale by comparison.

So Jesus went through all that on this occasion, because we have to go through this and He suffered it on our behalf.

Now think about the Last Supper one more time. Remember, "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you."

Jesus Knew Something

Now when they broke up the roof of the house and let that paralyzed man down in front of Jesus that he might be healed, Jesus knew something that none of those assembled seemed to know. He knew something that the men who let the man down on the pallet did not know. He knew that sin had a terrible, horrifying price tag connected to it.

All of these little sins that we commit, all these lies that we tell, all the fornication that we engage in, all of the wrong things that we do in this life, every single one of them has a price tag connected to it, and sooner or later, you're going to have to pay it.

Jesus knew that in forgiving this man his sin and healing him of his disease that He had to pay it. He knew He was going to have to pay the price.

Throughout His ministry, every time Jesus healed a withered hand, every time He healed a blind man, every time He healed a dumb man and enabled him to speak, every time He knew what it was going to cost Him in the end.

No one present on that day knew what Jesus knew. As that man got up and walked, Jesus knew that He would have to pay for that healing with his own body.

Why Healing in Christ's Ministry?

Have you ever really thought much about why healing played such a large part in Christ ministry? To you and me, healing is a mere conjunction of power and compassion. If we had the power and if we had the compassion, then healing somebody is automatic. It's a no-brainer to us. If we had the power to heal we would do it out of mere compassion for the sick, but you know, the real question that we have where Jesus is concerned, is not why He healed people, it's why He didn't heal everybody? When He healed, it had a purpose and it had a meaning. The meaning was that He had the power and the authority to forgive sins, and to triumph over it, but every time He did it, He knew there was a price to pay for it.

What Does the Bread in the Days of Unleavened Bread Stand For?

In the beginning, I ask why would a Gentile church be observing the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread some 30 years after Christ's ascension? Maybe it was because they knew something that we don't know. What does the bread in the days of unleavened bread stand for? What does it mean? Part of the answer to this question lies in an encounter that Jesus had with a group of people that He had fed, some 5000 of them. A large group of these people tracked Him down when he tried to get away from them. I'm glad they did, because, in His answer to these people, lies the answer to the question I've been asking.

Jesus was not particularly impressed with this crowd of people that tracked Him down, that is He wasn't particularly impressed with their motives. He had just fed them, 5000 of them on the other side of the lake. He had fed them with a few loaves of bread and a few fish and a great miracle.

Jesus is the Bread of Life

Now they have tracked Him down on the other side of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:25-59). They said "Rabbi, when did you come over here, how did you get here?" And Jesus, as I said, was not very impressed, said "You're not seeking me because you saw signs, you are seeking me because you ate the loaves of bread and were filled. You got your bellies full, that's the only reason you are here. Don't work for the food that perishes, work for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give you, for on him the father God has set his seal." And they said, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" And Jesus said "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent and that you believe me. God sent me, and I'm telling you these things, you say that you want to work

God's work. Well, first of all, believe me." They said to him, "What will you do for a sign so that we may see and believe you? Yea, what work will you perform? Our fathers ate bread in the wilderness."

They still have bread on their mind and their bellies, and they quote Scripture to Jesus. He answered and said in John 6 and verse 32, "I tell you the truth, it isn't Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world."

We keep asking, what is this bread in the Passover, the Lord's supper, the Holy Communion, what is the role of the bread? Jesus says "The bread of God is that which came down out of heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him. "Oh Lord, give us forever more this bread," and Jesus said, one of the most important things that He said in his entire ministry, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger. He who believes in me shall never thirst. But I say to you, you have seen me and you still don't believe. All that the father gives me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out. I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent Me, And this is the will of him who sent Me, that of all that he has given me, I lose nothing, but will raise it up on the last day, for this is the will of my father that everyone who beholds the Son. Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day."

Later in verse 47 Jesus said this, "I'm going to tell you the truth, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life." He said this twice now, "I am the bread of life."

So when you start wondering what is the bread of the Passover. It is the body of Christ. It is the bread of life.

"Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down out of heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats this bread he shall live forever. The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

This is astonishing. We all know that the blood of Jesus Christ forgives us of all of our sins. That's one of the clearest things in all of Christian theology. But now we understand that his flesh, His body is the source of the life of the world.

Well, the Jews gathered around again and began to argue with one another, saying, "This man can't give us his flesh to eat. This is not possible" and Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."

Now I can imagine how that must have set people back on their heels. On the other hand, these people did understand the concept of covenant and the cutting of a covenant, the sharing of a sacrificial meal and to some extent even the symbolic drinking of the blood of

an animal or person in order to enter into a covenant. So maybe It didn't hit them as strangely as it might fall on our ears, but still, Jesus said, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, not one or the other but both, has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh, (symbolically the bread), His body is the bread of life. And drinks my blood abides in me and I in him, as the living Father sent Me, I live because of the Father, so he who eats me shall live because of me." This is the bread which came down out of heaven. "Many of his disciples, when they heard all this said, "This is a hard saying, who can hear this" and Jesus listen to them and said, "Does this offend you"

Later on He said, "This is the reason that I told you, no man can come to me unless it is been granted to him of the Father, and as a result of this, many of his disciples went back and did not walk with him anymore."

So, now you know why a Gentile church, 30 long years after the ascension of Christ, was still celebrating the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. It wasn't a matter of legalism. It wasn't a matter of what laws that had been done away with.

What is the simple answer? It is because the entire Passover and Unleavened Bread season was all about Christ! Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are in the end, Christian holidays.

Until next time, I'm Ronald L. Dart.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a Born to Win Radio Program given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: Christian Holidays #6 (CHD6) 11/7/00
Transcribed by: bb 3/14/11

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