

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE PASSOVER

THE PASSOVER is being celebrated - the most important, glorious, and joyful of the festivals of Israel; the birthday-feast of the chosen people - that festival which has been kept for fifteen hundred years, and annually greeted with fresh delight; upholding, by its mere occurrence, the historical truth of the wonderful deliverance of Abraham's seed from the sword of the destroying angel, by the sprinkled blood of lambs.

As the festive memorial of this great event, it continually called for renewed thanksgiving and humiliation before the Father of mercies. With the necessity for spiritual deliverance, it equally revived the hope of redemption by the blood of the promised Prince of Peace, of which the deliverance experienced in Egypt was a type.

Let us then cast a transient look at the typical feast itself.

The angel of divine justice had been sent from the throne of the eternal Majesty to smite all the first-born in Egypt, and to sweep them away from the face of the earth. To the seed of Abraham, however, a means of deliverance was given. Each head of a family was ordered to take a male lamb out of his flock, kill it, sprinkle its blood on his doorposts, and then quietly and confidently remain in his dwelling.

“And the blood,” said the Lord, **“shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt”** (Exodus 12:13).

Who does not perceive in this divine ordinance the symbolic announcement of the eternal redemption projected for sinners in the counsels of God? Who still doubts that the Lamb, on which the deliverance depended, signified Christ, the only Saviour - that the slaying of the lamb had reference to Christ's atoning sufferings and death for sinners - that the sprinkling of the doorposts with the blood of the victims foreshadowed to the believing sinner, the divine imputation of the merits of the great Surety to all who should humbly submit to His method of salvation, by repentance and faith in the atoning blood of the Lamb of God?

This great symbolical announcement of salvation was handed down through successive ages; and the wondrous deliverance in Egypt was annually brought to the recollection of the people by the Feast of the Passover. They then beheld the lambs - those significant types of the expected Lamb of God - led to the slaughter, and at the sight of their streaming blood, the thanksgivings of the people were renewed for the deliverance wrought for their forefathers in Egypt, as well as the joyful hope of that spiritual deliverance for which they waited. In this hope they encouraged themselves, and exclaimed, with increasing confidence, "He who shall bear our sins, will come without fail, for we have here the seal and pledge of the faithful and true God."

And while consuming the paschal lamb in the family circle, after the observance of the sacrificial rites, they rejoiced to find another divine idea in this unpretending outward act, namely, that a faithful appropriation and reception of that which God would impart to sinners in the blood of Christ should form the only condition attached to a participation in eternal salvation.

We have now arrived at the moment in which Christ connected the institution of His sacred Supper with the Passover.

The word "connected," however, does not sufficiently convey our meaning. We designate the matter more correctly when we say that Christ has exalted the Mosaic festival of the Passover by changing it into His ordinance.

It is erroneous to suppose that the Old Testament is abrogated or put aside by the New. For in reality, not the minutest part of the Mosaic rites and ceremonies is abrogated; on the contrary, the whole is exalted from the state of type and shadow to that which is real and substantial.

This is the meaning of that saying of Christ, "**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled**" (Matthew 5:17, 18).

Even as the blossom on the tree is not annihilated, but, fading, passes over into the fruit, and experiences in the latter a more substantial life, so all the types and shadows of the Old Testament were divinely ordained to be realized in the New.

The Old Testament figure of the priesthood, for instance, received its fulfillment in Christ, as well as the atoning sacrifices of the tabernacle and temple, which were types of His sufferings and death; while the whole of the Levitical ritual, with reference to purging, washing, and purifying, formed its substantial anti-type in the spiritual purification by the word, blood, and Spirit of Christ.

This is a remarkable fact, and ought greatly to strengthen Our faith.

The whole of Christ's work of redemption thus appears in all its parts as the vital fulfillment and realization of a cycle of types and figures, presented for upward of a thousand years, to the eyes of the people of Israel and of the whole world.

Can this be mere chance, or only the contrivance of human forethought and calculation?
Impossible!

Here we see the over-ruling hand of the living and true God. Here is His plan, His work, His performance. He that doubts this, doubts the existence of the sun at noonday. It is only in nature that we meet with God under a veil, while in His revelation, all veils and coverings are removed. Only seclude yourselves for a time, for the purpose of biblical study, and send up repeated and heartfelt aspirations for divine enlightenment, and you will unceasingly observe infallible traces of The Lord, and there will be no end to the discoveries you will make of all that is wonderful and glorious. Now, as the deliverance in Egypt found in Christ's atoning sacrifice its fulfilled and substantial anti-type, so likewise did the divinely-ordained Passover in the Lord's Supper.

Come, therefore, and see! The table at Jerusalem is prepared; and all that the feast requires is served up. The mysterious act of the washing of the disciples' feet has just been concluded; the bread may now be broken and the food enjoyed. The disciples are deeply affected.

The Master, who was made like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted, and in whose bosom beat a human heart which deeply sympathized with the poor children of Adam, sees before Him the paschal lamb, and in it the type of Himself. He is "**the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,**" even as He had caused Himself to be announced by His forerunner, John, at the commencement of His course. As a fresh testimony that He was so, He had made His entry into the Holy City on the same day on which the paschal lambs were wont to be brought in for the slaughter.

After they had again sat down, JESUS begins, in tones of heartfelt tenderness, to say to His disciples, "**With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.**"

O, observe what a glimpse He here gives us into the sanctuary of His inmost soul!

He has heartily desired to keep this feast with them. But for what reason? It doubtless appeared sweet and pleasant to Him to pass the last hours of a life devoted to the service of others, in the peaceful circle of those who harmonized with Him, and who were the germinating seed of His Church, away from the discordant sounds of unbelief and the noise of an opposing world.

It must also have been consolatory to Him to celebrate the close of His career in the bosom of affection, and in the society of His confidential followers, and then take His leave of them in an undisturbed and peaceful manner. But do not suppose that, in what has preceded, you have exhausted the causes of His desire.

Beware, especially, of ascribing to the Lord anything of that sickly nature, which is usually termed sentimentality. As in Him all was sound, and full of pith and energy, so He was also a perfect stranger to our morbid sensibility, our selfish pleasure in effeminate and visionary sensations.

That which caused Him to long so ardently for this Passover was, doubtless, love; not, however, a love that seeks enjoyment, but which burns to do good, to beautify, and bless.

Our Saviour's desire to partake of this last Passover doubtless arose chiefly from His heartfelt longing for the coming of that hour in which He should be able to make an end of our state of condemnation, and nail to the cross the handwriting that was against us. He also cordially rejoiced in anticipation of this peaceful evening, as the point of time when He should be permitted, in His intended and mysterious institution, to make His will, so to speak, in favor of His beloved followers, and with the consent of His heavenly Father, to bequeath to them the fruits of His atoning sufferings and death.

In a word, it was for the sake of the sacrament to be then instituted, that He longed so ardently and earnestly for the approach of this His last Passover feast. Long had this institution of His love presented itself as an attractive memorial, to His mind.

Hence you may judge of the importance which ought to be attached to this sacred ordinance. An act which had simply reference to the establishment of a friendly festive memorial, would never have been to the Son of God the object of such a profound, ardent, and long-cherished desire.

The words, "**With desire have I desired,**" are of themselves sufficient to refute the rationalistic view of the Lord's Supper.

They impress upon the sacred feast the stamp of a divine mystery--of an ordinance.

O, my Lord and Saviour, thus ardently did Thy heart long for the moment when Thou couldst bequeath this legacy of Thy loving-kindness to us sinners! Even the horrifying night of death, which was so soon to dose around Thee, did not hinder Thee from thoughts of such compassion!

O, how hast Thou loved us to the end! And yet who loves Thee in return, and thanks Thee as he ought for the rich inheritance bestowed upon us, or dilly estimates this gift of Thy grace!

With the expression of heartfelt desire our Lord connects one of a prophetic nature, and soon after adds another of a similar character:

"For I tell you," says He, **"that I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."**

As if He had said, "We are about to part; our connection with each other will be henceforth of a different kind. But we shall see each other again, and once more sit at meat together."

We ask inquisitively and anxiously, When? and, further, inquire what it is that now presents itself to the mind of our Lord, and elevates Him above the pain of parting?

The eye of His spirit looks into the distant future. He says, **"I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."**

The Lord knows what He is saying, and rejoicing in spirit, sees what He refers to dearly and distinctly before Him. We only perceive something of it in the dawning distance; but even this is sufficient to cast a reflection of the Saviour's joy into our hearts.

The Lord's Supper has not yet experienced its final fulfillment. It points prophetically to something further, and even greater and more glorious.

A feast of the reconciled and redeemed is yet forthcoming, with which our present communion stands in proportion only like the copy of the original or like the foretaste to the full enjoyment. When this feast shall be celebrated, faith will have become sight, that which is in part have become that which is perfect, and strife and conflict have terminated in enduring triumph.

This high festival, which shall nevermore be interrupted, will be held at the moment when the kingdom of God shall be accomplished and completed. Something new will then take the place of our present communion.

Ask me not wherein it will consist. It is certain, however, that our Lord, in the words, "**I will not any more eat this passover with you, until it be fulfilled,**" does not merely intend to say, "till we shall rejoice together in the perfect glory of My kingdom, and with all the redeemed." We are not entitled thus generally to explain His language. The expression He makes use of does not refer merely to something indefinitely spiritual; the addition, which the Lord afterward makes, is quite at variance with such a view.

It belonged to the ritual of the Passover that four cups should be handed round, having reference to the four promises in the divine announcement of the miraculous deliverance in Egypt, viz.: "**I, The Lord, will bring you out, deliver, redeem, and take you to be my people, and will be your God.**"

After presenting one of these cups, during the social meal at Jerusalem, probably the first of the four, which must not be confounded with the cup after supper, mentioned in Luke 22:20, the Lord thus expresses Himself, "**I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the day when I shall drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.**"

What does this mysterious sentence mean?

Does He only mean to say, "I will drink no more passover wine, but will eventually enjoy that heavenly felicity with you which is signified by the wine, in full measure, in the Church triumphant?"

The Lord could not possibly have intended that we should thus generalize the meaning of His very striking language, so solemnly introduced with the words, "**I say unto you.**"

But in Christ's perfected kingdom on earth there will be something similar to our communion prepared for us, at which, perhaps as from the tree of life in Paradise, we shall again eat, and where we shall again drink as from the fountains of Eden!

Our Lord really seems to hint at something of this nature, although the kind of eating and drinking, for which the glorified creation will furnish the elements, may, for the present, remain a mystery to us.

Suffice it to say that the Saviour here undoubtedly points out the Passover of the New Covenant - in which He elevates and transforms that which was typical in the Old - as the prelude of a great and festal jubilee, which awaits His believing followers in the future of the kingdom of God.

That which exalts the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to such a prelude will appear in the sequel of our meditations.

O that it may be manifested as such to the experience of all who approach it, and cause them to exclaim with delight "**This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven!**"

This would assuredly be the case, if they only came duly hungering, thirsting, and believing. A single participation of the sacred ordinance would then teach them more of its true nature and object than a hundred theological discourses. They would then leave the holy place inwardly rejoicing in the language of the Psalmist, "**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over!**"

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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