

around claiming he was king of Israel. The faithful Israelites would have recognised Abimelech's claim to be king for what it was; it was a false claim. But those who lacked a correct understanding blindly took up their bough and followed him.

How ironic it was, then, that when the true heir of the throne came, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Jews treated him as though he were Abimelech! His disciples acknowledged that he was the anointed one. Earlier on, in Matthew 16, Peter had said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). But most of the Jews rejected Christ as their prospective king. This rejection finally manifested itself fully at the crucifixion, when the chief priests asked Pilate: "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews" (Jno. 19:21).

Abimelech was not a true king of Israel. He said he was king but he was not really king. For over three years he had made this false claim. Likewise the Lord Jesus Christ had for over three years stated that he was to be the king of Israel. But his claims were treated with the contempt which should have been shown towards Abimelech. In asking his disciples to take up the stake and follow him, the Lord Jesus was, in effect, asking them to make a choice between him and the Abimelechs of the world. We ourselves have to make the same choice. Do we blindly follow the majority in the world as they carry their

burdens to self-destruction? Or do we take up our stake and follow the Lord Jesus, knowing that he is to be our King, and that in the end, if we lose our life, we will find it again?

### Conclusion

Having spoken to servants, wives and husbands, Peter addresses all his readers: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8). When we think back to the crucifixion of Christ, what example do we see that we can follow in order to know how to obey these words of Peter?

Perhaps one example is the way the Lord Jesus, when close to death, cared for his mother: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (Jno. 19:25-27). As we see this compassionate, lovely man caring for his mother in the pain and agony of approaching death, as we see the disciple taking the mother of the Lord Jesus to care for her in his own home, we see how we should behave in the ecclesia. We see the example. We see the steps we should follow.

## "This do in remembrance of me"

David Burges

**O**UR RECOGNITION of God's supreme love in giving the Lord Jesus Christ as the sacrifice for our sins is focused in the remembrance of our Saviour in the Breaking of Bread. It is the very centre of the true disciple's worship. By sharing in the memorial meal, faithful believers meet with their Lord and are enabled to meditate upon his incomparable righteousness and willing self-sacrifice, and upon the grace which brings forgiveness. And from the remembrance of his suffering for them upon the cross, their eyes are lifted up to contemplate with eager hearts the promise of his return.

### A commandment of Jesus

The very first Breaking of Bread was celebrated by Jesus and his disciples at a very poignant

moment, the night of his arrest and trial. Whilst the twelve were largely in sublime ignorance of the great events that were about to break over them, the Lord knew all too clearly what faced him, and this makes all the more moving his deep concern for *their* welfare during that meal in the upper room. It was to be for their own good that his followers, down the centuries, would repeat the simple procedure of that meal of remembrance.

The details of the ceremony were spelled out by Jesus in straightforward instructions: "Take, eat; this is my body . . . Drink ye all of it . . . this do in remembrance of me" (Mt. 26:26,27; Lk. 22:19). These are clearly to be understood as *commandments* of the Lord Jesus to be received by all disciples. In John's record of the extended

discourse of Jesus to his companions (his 'exhortation') in the upper room and on the subsequent walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus assured them: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I *command* you"; and this immediately after teaching them that "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jno. 15:14,13). Here, then, is a clear reminder that we cannot be the friends of Jesus if we neglect the commandment to remember him, as he appointed, in the Breaking of Bread.

Indeed, it is arguable that Jesus's twice-repeated charge that evening, "That ye love [*agapē*] one another; as I have loved you", was in fact a direct instruction for all disciples to remember his love for them by sharing in the memorial meal: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love [*agapē*] one to another" (Jno. 13:34; 15:12; 13:35). The word *agapē* is used by the apostles to refer to the meal in 2 Peter 2:13 and Jude verse 12, where the RV has "love-feasts", and from the earliest times it is the Breaking of Bread that has been the characteristic Christian act of worship, recognised as such by believers and nonbelievers alike.

It is therefore to ignore an essential injunction of our Master if we deliberately neglect to meet with him and with our fellow-saints at his table. Yet it goes without saying that the mere performance of the act is of no value without a true and deep-felt inward gratitude to God and His Son for the act of love which it represents.

#### The remembrance of Christ's sacrifice

The Lord Jesus is specific that the Breaking of Bread was to be a continuing, repeated memorial of his voluntary death as a sacrifice for our sins: "this do in *remembrance* of me" (literally, "*keep* doing this in remembrance of me"); and Paul adds the words, "as *oft* as ye drink it" (1 Cor. 11:24,25), to convey the same idea. Since Jesus's grave would be empty, there would be no requirement for his followers to erect a memorial stone, according the customs of men. Rather, they would remember the supreme sacrifice of their *living* Saviour by the repeated act of meeting to share this meal.

The constituents of the meal were specific: bread to represent his body, wine to represent his blood.<sup>1</sup> Both bread<sup>2</sup> and wine are produced by processes involving crushing and bruising, making them fitting symbols of the sacrifice of the flesh of the Son of man. There are clear Old Testament anticipations of these, as when Abra-

ham met with Melchizedek, God's high priest, shared bread and wine, and received a blessing (Gen. 14:17-20); and the occasion when David, having brought up the ark to Zion, blessed all Israel, and gave to all bread, flesh and wine<sup>3</sup> (1 Chron. 16:1-3). Furthermore, the Law required that the daily sacrifices, morning and evening, should be accompanied by both a meal offering (flour mingled with oil) and a drink offering of strong wine (Num. 28:3-8).

It is Jesus himself who draws attention to the parallel between himself and the gift of manna in the wilderness. In the extended discourse in John 6, following the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus speaks of himself as the "true bread from heaven" (v. 32), graciously provided by the Father to bring life to the world. Consequently Jesus declares twice that he is "the bread of life" (vv. 35,48). His words climax in the remarkable challenge: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (vv. 53,54). To partake of blood was forbidden under the old covenant,

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1. It is remarkable and depressing that most of Christendom has been taught to understand Jesus's words as meaning that the bread and wine are miraculously converted by the presiding 'priest' into the substance of the flesh and blood of Christ, the doctrine of Transubstantiation. There are examples enough in Scripture of the use of the word 'is' as meaning 'represents' or 'symbolises', perhaps the most relevant to this issue being, "This cup *is* the new testament in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25); clearly the cup itself was not *literally* the testament (or covenant). Furthermore, when Jesus uttered these words he was still very much alive, and the sacrifice of his body and blood had not yet been made. See *The Gospel of Mark*, A. D. Norris, pp. 140-41.
  2. Some have argued that the bread should be unleavened, but there is no example of the use of the term *hoi azumoi* in the New Testament descriptions of the Breaking of Bread, and no specific instruction that it must be used. Its use was introduced by the Roman Church only in the eighth century, while the Eastern (Greek-speaking) churches apparently use leavened bread. At the least it should not be a matter insisted upon among us. For a fuller discussion, see *The Gospel of Mark*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
  3. Modern versions instead of "flagon" (AV) have "cake of raisins"; but see Song of Solomon 2:4,5 and Hosea 3:1, where the sense requires the same word to be translated as 'wine'. The literal meaning is apparently 'a pressing': see *Studies in the Gospels*, H. A. Whittaker, p. 675.

because “the life . . . is in the blood” (Lev. 17:10,11). Therefore to partake of Christ’s blood in symbol is to partake of his perfect life, the life which has overcome sin by the sacrifice of itself.

John’s Gospel does not otherwise refer directly to the institution of the Breaking of Bread, and these words are clearly to be understood in that context. Not that merely partaking of the emblems will enable the believer to attain to life; rather they are to focus the mind on what they represent. By partaking of them the individual believer is associating, in a most intimate way, with the sufferings of the Saviour, which he endured in order to bring redemption, and acknowledging the call to a life of self-sacrifice. For, as Jesus declared: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt. 16:24).

#### An act of fellowship

It is deeply significant that in instituting the memorial meal the Master directed that it was to be *shared* by believers. Although extreme circumstances might dictate otherwise, it was clearly intended that disciples should join together to remember their Lord.

Jesus’s well-known words, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20), although not immediately in the context of the Breaking of Bread, are certainly appropriate to it. And John explains that the apostles had witnessed of Christ so that “ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jno. 1:3). Consequently, at the table of remembrance a wonderful circle of fellowship is established which involves heaven itself.<sup>4</sup>

The meal, then, is to be shared by saints, who are all in the position of being forgiven sinners, to remember together the price that was paid for their common redemption. The Apostle Paul draws further attention to this by stressing how the believers are joined together at the Table: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [Gk. *koinōnia*, sharing, fellowship] of the blood of Christ? The bread [loaf<sup>5</sup>] which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many [Gk. *hoi polloi*] are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16,17).

The loaf that is broken<sup>6</sup> and shared not only represents the physical body of the Lord, which was so cruelly impaled on the stake, but also his

spiritual body, the ecclesia, of which his followers have each become a part. The cup of wine portrays vividly the blood of Christ which was shed, and which is the seal of the new covenant into which all believers have entered. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that we have come “to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling”, and offers up the prayer: “Now the God of peace, That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will . . .” (12:24; 13:20,21).

#### A prophecy of Christ’s return

At the Last Supper Jesus accompanied his distribution of both the bread and the wine with words assuring his disciples that what they were doing would one day be repeated in the Kingdom of God:

“for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 22:16);

“for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come” (v. 18);

“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Mt. 26:29).

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4. There are strong parallels between the Breaking of Bread and the peace offering (or fellowship offering, NIV) in the Law of Moses, both involving the sharing of a meal in the presence of God. See *Studies in the Gospels*, *op. cit.*, p. 673.
  5. The Greek *artos* normally has the sense of ‘loaf’, and the use of a whole loaf (of suitable size) seems a more fitting symbol for the body of Christ than a wafer or slice of bread.
  6. It has unfortunately become commonplace in Christadelphian practice to refer to Christ’s “broken body”, which is surely inappropriate in view of the insistence of Scripture that, in fulfilling the type of the Passover Lamb, “A bone of him shall not be broken” (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20; Jno. 19:31-36). It is true that Paul’s account includes the phrase, “this is my body, which is *broken* for you” (1 Cor. 11:24), but most modern versions omit the word “broken”, and Luke’s account has at the same point, “. . . which is *given* for you” (Lk. 22:19). If the word “broken” is insisted upon, it surely refers to the *bread* and not to Christ’s body. The worshippers do not each take a piece of Christ, but rather confess that they are a part of him. See *The Gospel of Mark*, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.

This repetition by the Master had a powerful import; it was to teach them that their remembrance of him would do more than recall his suffering on their behalf, more even than celebrate his victory over sin in the sacrifice of himself. It would also be a constantly repeated expression of belief in his Second Coming, in the resurrection of the dead and in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The Breaking of Bread was not to be an endlessly repeated ritual, always looking backwards, but was to be performed only *until* . . . It would, it will, have its complete fulfilment in “the marriage supper of the Lamb” at his coming (Rev. 19:9).

In this aspect, the memorial meal closely resembles the Feast of Passover, for that was at the same time a remembrance of God’s deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and a type of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. It looked both backwards with thankfulness and forwards with eager anticipation. And so for us does the Breaking of Bread. By it we are enabled, in Paul’s words, to “proclaim the Lord’s death *till* he come” (1 Cor. 11:26, RV).

### Examining ourselves

It was an essential consequence of their remembrance of the life of Jesus that his followers would be impelled to consider their own lives in the light of his. Consequently the memorial meal was to be accompanied by *exhortation* and *self-examination*. At the Last Supper, Jesus himself established the pattern when he delivered a lengthy discourse (Jno. 13–16), preparing the disciples for his impending departure, and encouraging them in the great work which they were soon to undertake in his name. Following the same pattern, we read of the Apostle Paul preaching through the night to the ecclesia at Troas, at the Breaking of Bread (Acts 20:7,11). And so we rightly carry on the same Scriptural tradition in our own practice by receiving the “word of exhortation” (13:15) in order to be reprovved and encouraged from the Word of life.

It is Paul who further reminds us of the need for self-examination at the Lord’s Table so that we may not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:28-30). In so doing we echo in effect the agonised queries of the eleven<sup>7</sup> at the Last Supper: “Lord, is it I?”. This demands an honest self-assessment and a confession of our sins, recognising our true worth in the sight of the Lord and seeking the cleans-

ing and restoration which come from him alone. Here is the true significance of the washing of the disciples’ feet by Jesus (Jno. 13:5-10; 15:3), that by sharing the meal with him his true followers, who were once washed in baptism, might be restored to full cleanliness.

### The wisdom of the Lord

The remembrance of Jesus is beautifully anticipated in the words of Solomon:

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:  
She hath killed her beasts [mg. killing]; she hath mingled her wine;  
She hath also furnished her table . . .  
Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.  
Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding” (Prov. 9:1-6).

Sheer familiarity with the mechanics of the Breaking of Bread can so easily dull our minds to the Divine wisdom that lies behind this means of remembering our Lord. After all, he could have chosen many other ways to ask us to remember him, from waving banners in the streets to erecting great statues or buildings! Instead we have the simplest of activities: a frugal meal shared by fellow believers, and sanctified by the giving of thanks.

For a community which was to be scattered among all nations, this had the marvellous advantage that it could be performed anywhere, at any time, and with any number of participants. It was to be essentially a family activity, carried on by fellow believers rejoicing in the salvation purchased for them by their Lord and Master. And so it could equally well be shared by a settled community in the ecclesia of a large town as by a tiny group of persecuted saints hiding for fear of the authorities. In all places and in nearly all circumstances the servants of Christ would be able to obey his commandment to remember him, and so be strengthened to serve him.

### The frequency of remembrance

When we examine the practice of the Breaking of Bread in the New Testament ecclesias, it

7. Judas also enquired of Jesus, “Master, is it I?” (Mt. 26:25), but we suppose that the motivation behind his question was not the same as that of the other eleven, who had no intention of betraying their master, or conception that it had to happen.

is evident that, from the beginning, it was an intrinsic part of ecclesial life, for “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in *breaking of bread*, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Furthermore, they did so frequently, “continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and *breaking bread* from house to house” (v. 46). Nevertheless, it eventually became the custom, in the absence of any direct commandment on the matter, to meet for the memorial meal on the first day of the week. Thus when Paul visited Troas, “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to *break bread*, Paul preached unto them” (20:7). It is also significant that Paul encouraged the Corinthians to make their contributions to the Lord’s work upon the same day: “Now concerning the collection for the saints . . . Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Cor. 16:1,2).

Since the Lord left no direct commands concerning the disciples’ frequency of remembrance, or specifying a particular day (the Last Supper probably took place on either a Wednesday or Thursday evening), these must be matters of choice, conscience and convenience. It has always seemed particularly appropriate, however, to remember the Lord Jesus upon the *first* day of the week, the day of the creation of light, the day of his resurrection, upon what has become known as the Lord’s Day.

**“This do in remembrance of me”**

We have seen that the remembrance of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sim-

plicity of a symbolic meal of bread and wine, encompasses a remarkable depth of meaning:

- It is a commandment of our Lord, to be obeyed as a token of our love and of our friendship with him.
- It is a graphic recollection of the suffering, perfect sacrifice and resurrection of our living Lord, by which we too may enter into life.
- It is an act of fellowship by forgiven sinners, rededicating ourselves to the new covenant with the Father, sealed by the blood of His Son.
- It is an acted prophecy by which we proclaim our faith in the Second Coming of Jesus and the marriage supper of the Lamb, in the Kingdom of God.
- It is a regular opportunity for self-examination, assisted by exhortation from God’s Word, leading to confession and true repentance from our sins.
- It is an activity suitable for any number of disciples, in any convenient place, at any time, to rejoice in their salvation and to be strengthened to overcome.

It is truly a mark of the wisdom of God that such a simple activity is able to encompass such varied and deep significance for all true followers of Jesus Christ. May we all share joyfully in the blessings of meeting with our Saviour at his Table now, so that, by God’s grace, we may share fellowship with him for eternity in his Kingdom.