

THE TRYSTINGS OF LOVE

“With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...and he took bread and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to them saying, This is my body which is given for you this do in remembrance of me. And the cup in like manner after supper (the Passover), saying, This cup is the new covenant (agreement) in my blood, even that which is poured out for you.” - Luke 22:15-20 (R.V.)

THIS Passover would be different from all the previous celebrations in the Lord’s short life. From the age of twelve He would have been able, in His home in Nazareth to partake of this annual feast. In the three years of His public ministry he probably celebrated it with His disciples and close friends. This one, however, was different and very special. When the official Passover meal was concluded their Master reached again for the bread and breaking it said *“my body - given for you”*. He passed it around and they all partook for the second time. What would their thought have been? I think I can see the confused looks on many faces! But the drama continued and intensified, He reached forward again and took one of the Passover cups and called it the *“new covenant in MY blood which is poured out for you”*.

How strange! A NEW covenant in MY blood!!

It is true that their history was steeped in covenants and covenant making, indeed it had also been a history of covenant breaking! And they were very familiar with blood covenants. But to try to comprehend what a covenant in their Master’s blood could possibly mean was enough to unhinge their minds. Not only was it new because of this, but also because it would be a covenant, not between two parties but ONE party. God would covenant with Himself, in His Son. Divinity would make an agreement with Divinity. That would make it permanent and forever secure. It could never be broken. This is the story explained in great detail in the Hebrews letter.

This covenant when enacted would affect all it embraced in a number of ways. And, it would take the disciples a lifetime to understand the far reaching implications of it, as direct revelations and the Holy Spirit would enlighten them.

It would affect their RELIGIOUS life.

As sons of Israel they were the possessors of the only God given religion. Through sacrifice, Tabernacle and Temple God had given them a special privilege of fellowship and worship. They were NEAR to God, not like the Gentiles (nations) around them who were "*without God and without hope*" (Ephesians 2:12). They, in contrast, were loved with an "*everlasting love*" (Deuteronomy 28:9) "*...that he may establish thee as a holy people unto himself that he may be unto thee God*".

Now this NEW covenant would change all that, and in the immortal words of the Good Shepherd this covenant would bring in "*other sheep not of this (Jewish) fold!*" - John 10:16.

This was like standing all these disciple knew and revered upon its head! Peter's experience on the house top with the sheet and animals, clean and unclean, in itself illustrates how difficult the whole concept was (Acts 10). Added to this there was his retreat from eating with Gentile believers in Antioch when visited there by James and suffering a stinging rebuke from his fellow Apostle, Paul (Galatians 2:12-19).

PRAISE GOD THE VAST MAJORITY OF US ARE THE 'OTHER' SHEEP!

Then it would affect them POLITICALLY.

They had been taught that there was coming a MESSIAH, a conquering King who would deliver them from all their woes, sorrows and afflictions. He was prophesied to rule from "*shore to shore*" (Psalm 72). He would drive out , for good, the invaders and give them peace. While in the calendar of God all this would ultimately come to pass. The new covenant would proclaim that before there could be national salvation there would have to be individual salvation, by the remission of sins, through the blood of His cross! This unfolding message led to more problems for them as hinted at in the disciples question after the Resurrection "*Wilt Thou AT THIS TIME restore the kingdom to Israel?*" - Acts 1:6.

They might also have recalled one of their Master's answer to Pilate - "*My kingdom is not of this world*". The laws of the NEW Covenant would be written, not on parchment or stone but, on their hearts and that would lead all who would embrace this covenant as a priority to consider that they were citizens of a "*heavenly country*" (Hebrews 11:16).

Finally it would affect them ECONOMICALLY.

Under the previous or Old Covenant the nation of Israel was promised a land that would be especially blessed materially (Deuteronomy 28:2-8). Blessings and prosperity, would however, depend on OBEDIENCE. But under the New Covenant obedience would not automatically be followed by material prosperity.

One of those who reclined at the table with him was Peter, the Apostle who years later addressed his Letter to the "*elect who are sojourners of the dispersion*" - *1 Peter 1*. In modern language they were 'refugees'. They had lost everything and were now seeking some kind of economic stability on foreign shores.

The Apostle Paul, too, reflects on the effect the New Covenant had on him, "*What things were gained to me, those I counted loss for Christ*" - *Philippians 3:5-8*. Perhaps the most stark statement characterising life under the New Covenant is found in 2 Timothy 3:12 - "*They that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution*". I find this a searching, even devastating, concept in the context of Western 'Christian' values! However, we must remember that this truth was articulated to the disciples by their Lord, "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.....for what is a man (disciple) profited if he gain the whole world and lose or forfeit his own self*" - *Luke 9:23-26 (R.V.)*

DREW CRAIG