

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009
Allen, TX 75013-0017

April 5, 2018

Dear Brethren,

Sharron and I have just returned from a trip to Florida. We attended the Passover, the Night to Be Much Observed and the First Day of Unleavened Bread with the DeFuniak Springs, Florida, and Mobile, Alabama, congregations. We had a sobering and meaningful Passover with the brethren in DeFuniak Springs; we celebrated the Night to Be Much Observed with Harold and Loree Rhodes (local pastor and wife) along with a group from both congregations; and we had a combined service on the first holy day with a record attendance.

I began my sermon on the holy day by reading from Hebrews 9:27-28: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

Each year at the Passover we are reminded that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ “to bear the sins of many” and His promise to return give us assurance of forgiveness and an anchor of hope in a dark and violent world.

I remember when my family first began attending services with the Radio Church of God when I was 12 years old. We thought that since Christ would return soon, there was no need to worry about death. But then one Sabbath we came to services and were informed that the night before a young member—in his early 30s and the father of five little girls—had died of a massive heart attack. This was the first death that I can recall of someone I knew in the Church.

The realization of death and the promise of eternal life are major themes for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. We come together to “proclaim” (1 Corinthians 11:26) the beating and subsequent death of our Savior and what it means for our healing and our salvation. In this mortal life, we accept that death will come to all of us, with the exception of those alive when Christ returns. We understand that death is tragic and painful for those left behind, but the real tragedy is if we lose our hope of eternal life! When a loved one dies, his physical journey is over, and he is awaiting the resurrection. But what about all of us who are still on this journey? We have the same hope and the same promise. “And this is the promise that He promised us—eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

As Christians, we have the greatest privilege in the world—to know the truth and to be part of “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). John wrote, “But all who have received Him, to them—that is, to those who trust in His name—He has given the privilege of becoming children of God” (John 1:12; Weymouth New Testament).

Just think, as we were observing the First Day of Unleavened Bread, the “Christian” world was preparing to celebrate Easter. Imagine that—a religious holiday that has idolatry written in its very name! Jesus Christ died on Passover day, and He rose from the dead exactly three days and three nights later. We are all familiar with the contortions the religious world goes through to get three days and three nights between Good Friday afternoon and Easter Sunday morning. Those who are

honest eventually admit that this is an impossible task. So, they come up with a variety of concocted explanations, but none of them address the plain scripture stating that Christ would be in the “heart of the earth” for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:39-40).

For us, this is one of the most sobering and exciting times of the year. We are sobered at the realization of what Jesus Christ endured prior to and including His death. Jesus Christ was “God ... manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:15). He gave up His position of glory with the Father in heaven and became a human being, but He was still God “manifested in the flesh.” It was only a sacrifice of this magnitude that could cover the sins of all mankind (John 3:16).

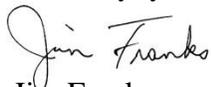
Following the sobering proclamation of the death of Jesus Christ on Passover night (1 Corinthians 11:26), 24 hours later, we celebrated a joyous occasion, the Night to Be Much Observed. This was the night that the Israelites departed from Egypt. One day they were slaves to the Egyptians, and the next they were a nation, fulfilling the promise made to Abraham 430 years prior (Exodus 12:40-41). It is a night to celebrate God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promises. Being called out of this world into the truth of God’s way—going from being a people in slavery to a people freed from sin—is reason for a great celebration. It is a night to be much observed!

As we complete seven days of eating unleavened bread, picturing the replacing of sin with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, we must not forget that we have been given the promise of eternal life by the same God who fulfilled His promise to Abraham by miraculously bringing the Israelite slaves out of Egypt. We should use this feast as a time to draw closer to God and a time to give Him thanks for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the special privilege of our calling. Removing leavening from our homes is a relatively easy and painless task, but the removal of sin from our lives is a lifelong process.

The reality of death and the hope of eternal life come together with the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Hebrews 9:27-28 lays out some of the important themes of this festival season—our mortality (“appointed for men to die once”); the forgiveness of sin (“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many”); and the hope of eternal life (“He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation”).

I hope this festival season has been full of meaning for you and your family and that as it ends, you will have renewed conviction to keep sin out of your life and to praise and honor God the Father for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ “to put away sin” (Hebrews 9:26)!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,



Jim Franks