
THE GREAT CROWD OF PARTAKERS

As we near this year's Memorial Supper on March 26, 2013, in remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that the Spirit of Truth is actively bearing witness with the sons of the Kingdom and guiding them 'into all truth.' (*John 16:12-14*) Christians around the world are focusing our minds and hearts on the scriptures, examining them to determine whether our understanding of things are correct (*Acts 17:11*), and whether we need to adjust our thinking and behavior in any way so as not to show disrespect for the occasion. (*1 Corinthians 11:28-29*)

One of the foremost questions we consider is whether we individually should be active participants in the symbolic drama of eating the bread and drinking the cup, or whether we should sit quietly and observe others commune with the Christ. This is an important question because on the night Jesus instituted the supper, he gave the command to "keep doing this in remembrance of me." (*Luke 22:19*) So it is imperative that we know whether his command applies to us individually, for if it does and we fail to 'keep doing this,' we cannot expect the Christ to confess us to his Father. (*Matthew 10:32*)

The 'Doctrine of the 144,000 Kings and Priests' has been instrumental in deciding whether one can participate in the Memorial Supper. The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses teaches that in all of Christian history, only 144,000 followers of Christ are allowed to partake of the Memorial Supper because they alone are in the 'covenant for a kingdom' and will thus enter the heavens to serve as kings and priests over the earth. And it is assumed that most of that number have already lived and died so that only a small remnant remain on earth today. The Doctrine of the 144,000 is founded on an interpretation of certain verses in the Bible book of Revelation.

But what if the Doctrine of the 144,000 has been misunderstood? What if the 144,000 referred to in the book of Revelation are not the ones in the 'covenant for the kingdom' and are not designated to be kings and priests? Would that change the answer to the question of who can or should participate in the Memorial Supper? It certainly would! For if the number of those in the covenant is not known or is not limited, then **everyone** who loves the Christ and wants to 'follow him wherever he goes' **must** participate! There would be no excuse for rejecting the opportunity to remember the Christ in the way he commanded. So let us take a closer look at what the scriptures in the book of Revelation really say about the 144,000 and the kings and priests.

The first mention of the 144,000 appears in the 7th chapter of Revelation where the Apostle John hears an accounting of that particular group:

"And I heard the number of those who were sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of

Israel. Out of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed.” – *Revelation 7:4-8*

Then the Apostle John sees a vision of a second group:

“After these things I saw, and, look! **a great crowd, which no man was able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes; and there were palm branches in their hands.” – *Revelation 7:9*

So, we see here that the 144,000 are from twelve tribes of ‘the sons of Israel;’ whereas the ‘great crowd’ is a multi-national group of a great unknown number. And we notice that neither these verses, nor the surrounding verses identify either group as kings or priests.

The only other instance in the book of Revelation where the 144,000 are mentioned is in the 14th chapter:

“And I saw, and, look! the Lamb standing upon the Mount Zion, and with him **a hundred and forty-four thousand** having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. . . . And **they are singing as if a new song** before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and **no one was able to master that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand**, who have been bought from the earth.” – *Revelation 14:1, 3*

The group of 144,000 are standing with ‘the Lamb’ and are referred to as master singers, but not as kings and priests. And what about the second group, the multi-national great crowd? Do they have a designated assignment? The answer is found in the 5th chapter:

“And when he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp and golden bowls that were full of incense, and the [incense] means the prayers of the holy ones. And they sing a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals,

because you were slaughtered and with your blood **you bought persons for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth.**” – *Revelation 5:8-10*

Here, John is told that a multi-national great crowd are the ones who would be kings and priests! How did we miss this point? How did those who developed the Doctrine of the 144,000 fail to see that the kings and priests are not the 144,000, but are really a ‘great multi-national crowd?’ This clarification makes a huge difference in the fundamental teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses. It reveals that the teaching that only a limited number of mankind would qualify as kings and priests is a misinterpretation – an error.

Instead, John the Revelator tells us that those who would serve as kings and priests are unnumberable! No man is able to count the number of those who would serve as kings and priests. Doesn’t that now effect our view of who can and should participate in the Memorial Supper? And doesn’t it now effect our view of who can enter the Kingdom of the Heavens? It certainly should!

But if the 144,000 are not to be kings and priests in heaven, who are they? Unfortunately, John does not identify them other than to say that they were able to master a certain song that no one else could master and that they were bought from the earth. (*Revelation 14:1-3*) From this, we know that at one time, this group were earthlings who found their way to heaven and who apparently have gained a specific knowledge, or understanding, or learned a certain skill that no one else has. So, it appears that there are other roles or assignments that those from earth will have in heaven other than being kings and priests. We will have to wait for a further revelation or for the fulfillment to gain a better understanding of this group of 144,000.

But, really, it is not necessary that we be able to interpret the book of Revelation before we know whether we can obey the direct and unambiguous command of Jesus Christ to keep commemorating his life, his death and his ministry by participating in the symbolic drama of the Memorial Supper. Jesus made this point when speaking with certain Jews who were seeking to kill Jesus because he said he was the son of God:

“You are searching the Scriptures, because you think that by means of them you will have everlasting life; and these are the very ones that bear witness about me. And yet you do not want to come to me that you may have life.” – John 5:39-40

All who want life need simply to ‘come to Jesus.’ There is no need for scrupulously studying prophecy in order to know how we are to conduct ourselves, how we are to worship and how we are to carry out our ministry. His plain and open teachings are sufficient.

The only purpose the Doctrine of the 144,000 serves is to prevent Christ-loving people from ‘coming to Jesus,’ participating in the Memorial Supper, and seeking entrance into the Kingdom of the Heavens. There is **no** teaching of Jesus or the Christian Bible writers that supports such interference. In fact, there is a direct and specific condemnation by Jesus himself of anyone who would attempt to keep people out of the Kingdom of the Heavens:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut up the kingdom of the heavens before men; for you yourselves do not go in, neither do you permit those on their way in to go in.”
– *Matthew 23:13*

The removal of the Doctrine of the 144,000 allows all who are “seeking the Kingdom and his righteousness” (*Matthew 6:33*) to actively participate in the Memorial Supper. Yet we know that many will still have reservations, mostly because the Doctrine of the 144,000 is so ingrained in the Jehovah’s Witness psyche. More than the mere exposing of error is needed. The vacuum created by a failed Doctrine must be replaced by an even better Doctrine – one that inspires hope and healing. The Doctrine that fits the bill is the Doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man – the true good news of the Kingdom! (See **What is the Good News?**)

When Jesus began preaching and teaching, he made clear that **everyone** who exercises faith in him are sons of God:

“The true light that gives light to every sort of man was about to come into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into existence through him, but the world did not know him. He came to his own home, but his own people did not take him in. However, as many as did receive him, to them he gave authority to become God’s children, because they were exercising faith in his name; and they were born, not from blood or from a fleshly will or from man’s will, but from God.” – *John 1:9-13*

Even as Paul wrote:

“You are all, in fact, sons of God through your faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one [person] in union with Christ Jesus. Moreover, if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham’s seed, heirs with reference to a promise.” – *Galatians 3:26-29*

And we note that this ‘authority to become God’s children’ was given **before** holy spirit was poured out. We recall that the pouring out of holy spirit first occurred at Pentecost, after Jesus’ death:

“Now while the day of the [festival of] Pentecost was in progress they were all together at the same place, and suddenly there occurred from heaven a noise just like that of a rushing stiff breeze, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting. And tongues as if of fire became visible to them and were distributed about, and one sat upon each one of them, and **they all became filled with holy spirit** and started to speak with different tongues, just as the spirit was granting them to make utterance.” – *Acts 2:1-4*

Likewise, the first Memorial Supper was conducted with Jesus’ apostles **before** they were anointed with holy spirit. Thus, we know that even prior anointing is not a requirement in order to participate in the Memorial Supper!

Brothers, sonship with God has been the Father’s purpose since the beginning of creation:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ, just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love. **For he foreordained us to the adoption through Jesus Christ as sons to himself,** according to the good pleasure of his will.” – *Ephesians 1:3-5*

Truly, the commemoration of the Memorial Supper is without restriction. All who chose to commune with Christ and symbolically recall his life and death are welcome to participate. This understanding is consistent with the nature of our Father in heaven:

“At this Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘For a certainty I perceive that God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.” – *Acts 10:34-35*

For God to select a small number to enjoy everlasting life in the heavens with Him and the Christ, while the vast majority of mankind are relegated to the limited experiences of life on earth is showing partiality. Even those who adhere to the Doctrine of the 144,000 realize that the heavenly hope is the more glorious and superior reward.

Perhaps it would not be that much of a disparity if only 144,000, of the 108 billion who are estimated to have lived on earth, desired heavenly life. But that is not the case. Practically every religious person on the planet desires heavenly life. And if not for being taught the Doctrine of the 144,000, so would all of Jehovah's Witnesses. And if the scriptures are true that God is 'opening His hand and satisfying the desire of every living thing' (*Psalms 145:16*), then the heavenly hope is open to all.

When we understand the beautiful and magnanimous potential of heavenly life, what God-oriented person would not want to be a part of it? The only reason for rejecting the heavenly hope is ignorance of its reality. We hope that by means of this website, we can, and have, whet the spiritual appetite by showing what the Bible says about the heavens and heavenly life. Please take a look at the series of contemplative articles on our website entitled **The Glorious Heavenly Hope**, and see if you would still turn your back to this unparalleled privilege.

When we clear away the error of thinking that only a limited number of mankind are sons of God, joint heirs with Christ, with the heavenly hope, a tremendous burden is lifted from our shoulders. We no longer see ourselves as slaves of God, alienated from His special attention and destined to toil in corruptible bodies. Rather we see ourselves as favored children and welcomed citizens of a friendly universe with eternal and incorruptible life in view. We are better able to understand Jesus words:

“Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light.” – *Matthew 11:28-30*

And we no longer fear death for we know that after our mortal life has ended, untold blessings await us. And we can more easily apply Jesus' admonition:

“Stop storing up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal. Rather, **store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,** where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” – *Matthew 6:19-21*

“On this account I say to you: Stop being anxious about your souls as to what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your bodies as to what you will wear. Does not the soul mean more than food and the body than clothing? Observe intently the birds of heaven, because they do not sow seed or reap or gather into

storehouses; still your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they are? Who of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span? Also, on the matter of clothing, why are you anxious? Take a lesson from the lilies of the field, how they are growing; they do not toil, nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. If, now, God thus clothes the vegetation of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much rather clothe you, you with little faith? So never be anxious and say, 'What are we to eat?' or, 'What are we to drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?' For all these are the things the nations are eagerly pursuing. For your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. **Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [other] things will be added to you.**" – *Matthew 6:25-33*

Yes, rather than there being a mere remnant of 144,000 partakers and sharers with Christ, there is a great crowd of sons of God who are commanded to participate in the symbolic Memorial Supper.

Therefore, on the upcoming Memorial night, as you sit in your seat and the emblems of bread and drink are passed, what will you do? Will you shy away from the heavenly privilege and let the opportunity to confess the Christ pass you by? Will you fearfully and hurriedly pass the emblems to the person on your right as if you would be accursed for even touching them? Or will you courageously take your stand in the Kingdom of the Heavens and participate in the greatest symbolic supper of our lives?

It is up to each one of us to examine ourselves and make a personal decision. We hope that you choose to stand up for the Christ, stand up for the heavenly hope, **and stand up for yourself** as a faith son of the Father and a joint heir with the Christ. (*Romans 8:17*) May the Father's spirit bear witness with your spirit.

We welcome your comments.

"Elaia Luchnia"