

Witnesses to commemorate the death of Jesus

By Anita Stackhouse-Hite, The Porterville Recorder

Monday, after sundown, nearly 7 million Jehovah's Witnesses around the world will come together in their various meeting places for one purpose: To celebrate the memorial of the death of Christ Jesus.

This above all other events is the most important to them - not his resurrection as incorporated in Easter activities, but his death.

The reason for this is simple, according to local Witnesses Carl Morrison and Doug Grady.

“We celebrate his death because of Jesus' command in the Bible,” Morrison said. “That is the only celebration that Christians are commanded by Jesus to celebrate.”

“It's the death of Christ that makes the way possible for us to get life,” Grady said. “He died, as a ransom, for all of mankind. This year, on April 2, more than 16 million people will commemorate his death, nearly 7 million of that number will be Jehovah's Witnesses.”

Since 1996, an average of 1,500 people in Porterville, in two languages, have attended the Memorial service every year.

April 2 corresponds with Nisan 14 of the Jewish calendar, the actual date of the death of Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses hold the memorial of his death on Nisan 14 every year. Because the Jewish calendar is a lunar, from new moon to new moon, Nisan 14 can fall in the last part of March or the first part of April.

The celebration is mild by today's standards: Those in attendance hear a public discourse by a qualified Witness, during which the use of real red wine and unleavened bread are explained.

“The wine symbolizes the blood of Christ, which he poured out in our behalf,” Morrison said. “The bread is a symbol of his body that he sacrifices. It's important that people understand that these are not literally the blood and body of Christ - they are symbols representing what they stand for.”

Many religions today advocate taking of communion with greater frequency, even daily. Not so with Jehovah's Witnesses. The commemoration of the death of Christ is based on the Passover, the annual Jewish Festival, Grady said.

“The Passover was celebrated once a year,” he said. “In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Jesus is called the Passover Lamb. The Passover was mandated by Jehovah God to be commemorated once a year, so is the Memorial of the death of Christ.”

Partakers

Jehovah's Witnesses believe only those who have the hope of heavenly life are entitled to partake of the symbolic emblems of the bread and wine. The rest in attendance are there to observe and to learn the significance of the event.

Last year, of the more than 16 million in attendance, worldwide, a little more than 8,000 individuals

who professed to be of the anointed of Christ - those who would gain heavenly life and immortality with him - partook of the symbolic bread and wine.

“The Bible is clear that only 144,000 will inherit life in heaven,” Grady said. “The Bible refers to one Lamb, Jesus, and 144,000 who will rule with him in heaven as kings and priest. The number one is literal, and the number 144,00 is literal. The rest of mankind that exercises faith in the Ransom sacrifice have the hope of everlasting life on a paradise earth.”

The literal number of those chosen for life in heaven is the thing “people don't understand most,” according to Vic Reavis, one of the ministers who will give the discourse April 2. The same discourse will be given worldwide, and will include information from the Bible explaining the “little flock” - the relatively ‘little’ number of 144,000 from among mankind - and the “other sheep” - millions from among mankind who will be rewarded with life on a paradise earth - and the benefit each receive from the Ransom.

“Many don't understand the resurrection for those who will gain everlasting life on an earthly paradise and those who will gain life on earth, because that is not what their religions teach,” Reavis said. “In the Bible, 1 Corinthians. 5:7, 8 helps us understand the body and blood Christ. In Luke 22, Jesus made a covenant with his disciples for them to become part of the little flock. When [the first man] Adam sinned, he lost the prospect of living for himself and for every human that came after him. The Bible says the wages of sin is death.

“So the Ransom of Christ provides the opportunity for life for humans forever on earth as a gift, because Christ paid the price of a ransom by buying back what Adam lost for mankind. That is definitely a reason to celebrate.”

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