

Sweet Tea, Mexican Coke and Dublin Dr. Pepper!

In the quest to keep our weight down, we sometimes sacrifice lifetime pleasures and acquiesce to the neatly packaged bland offers of minimal sugar treats. Tiring of these substitutes, I decided to obey the command of Nehemiah 8:10 which says, *“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10). The refugees of captivity had finally come home and were ready to celebrate. Nehemiah gave them a diet that would depict their victory, *“eat the fat and drink the sweet.”*

In my youth there were three beverages that were acceptable, pleasurable treats for those of us reared up in t-total environments. Sweet tea, Coca-Cola, and Dr. Pepper. Forgive the colloquial reminisce, but all three are uniquely owned by the southern culture. Although these drinks have been imported to regions beyond, their roots are in the south. There is not a boy with a southern mother who didn't have iced (because of the warm weather) tea on hand before, during and after dinner or supper. Perhaps the most popular drink in the world is Coca-Cola. It was invented in Atlanta, Georgia by Dr. John Pemberton, a pharmacist in 1886 as a medicine. Then there is a very Texan as well as southern beverage, Dr. Pepper, again invented by a druggist, Charles Alderton in 1885 in Waco, Texas and is a drink that many a Texan proudly confesses an addiction to.

Recently at a family gathering with relatives coming in from everywhere, my wife made plenty of pitchers of sweet tea and was it ever good! I drank and remembered. When I was on a missions trip a few years ago to Mexico we didn't drink the water so we ended up drinking more Coke than usual. I remember thinking, this tastes like it did when I was a kid. I discovered one of our local grocers had imported Coke from Mexico. Curiously, I purchase one and at first taste the memories flooded my mind. South of the border it is still sweetened with sugar. Then today, after having preached a youth camp, we went out of the way to visit the oldest Dr. Pepper bottling company (circa 1891) in Dublin, Texas. They still make Dr. Pepper with cane sugar. In a taste test comparing the more common corn syrup sweetened Dr. Pepper to the old fashioned Dublin Pepper, the crowd forty and older almost always chose the cane sweetened as the best. The conclusion was, when we drink a Dublin Pepper, we are drinking a memory. This brings three delightful thoughts:

1. You don't need alcohol to facilitate a good time.

God's Word says, *“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright”* (Proverbs 23:31). This verse unquestionably describes the fermentation process. It speaks well to the advocating of being a total abstainer from alcoholic beverages. Wine is the fruit of the vine. It is easily seen in a casual study of the Bible - not all wines of the Bible are intoxicating, it is the name given to the juice of the grape. For the drink that does have the capacity to intoxicate, we are warned, *“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”* (Proverbs 20:1). The Bible says *“...wine that maketh glad the heart of man...”* (Psalm 104:15). We are saying, a sweet drink can be a blessing. For those who don't have a lot of cash funding, anybody can enjoy a good soft drink. You can drink this stuff and drive afterwards!

God says, *“But let us, who are of the day, be sober...”* (I Thessalonians 5:8). *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (I Peter 5:8). The Lord does not want any substance to alter our consciousness or behavior in a bad way. Alcoholic drink does most certainly alter behavior. In God's description of the effects of this drink, He says, *“Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again”* (Proverbs 23:33-35). The Bible warns us that

someone under the influence is making it easier to ignore the commandments of God even to the point of fornication or adultery. It is also cautioning that they may have no control of their temper and, although under normal circumstances one might not get into physical fights, when inebriated one would pick fights and is so drunk he won't realize what he has done until afterwards. There are records of people who have been in fights and woke up in jail unaware of the people they mauled or how they obtained their own wounds. There is documented evidence of people who have killed their spouse and later awakened not remembering when, why or how they did this. I am not making this up! And sadly the Bible says, they can never be satisfied; they *"will seek it yet again."*

Alcohol, when used to facilitate a good time, often becomes the harbinger of some really bad times. On the other hand, I thank God for my up-bringing that I still adhere to. We believe in living in such a way, we don't need drugs (including whiskey, beer or fermented wine) to modify or alter our frame of mind in an escape modus operandi. This brings me to another point:

2. Our Lord's first miracle was to transform water into a sweet beverage to celebrate a special event.

"When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now" (John 2: 9,10).

The custom of the day was to start the celebration with sweet, fresh, unfermented wine, then as the celebration prolonged, the juice that was older was brought out and served. As the women and children retired for the evening, the wine that was more likely to be fermented was served and the atmosphere began to change. When Jesus turned the water into wine, the ruler of the feast was amazed that the wine that was being served was "good." This was not referencing flavor as much as he was referring to the condition. And by the way, had our Lord made that which would place one under the influence, He would have contradicted what He had already said about it in the book of Proverbs.

It is fitting that we agree with Jesus. Let good events be celebrated! Let the virtuous concept of man and woman being wed be celebrated without a drink that represents anything but virtue. Let us drink the sweet in honor of something precious. We are living in a day when many Christians are breaking down moral barriers, by permitting, yea, even condoning and encouraging drinking alcoholic beverages. In weddings performed at Christchurch Baptist Fellowship we forbid to celebrate the permanency of marriage with a substance that has done more to hurt happy marriages than helped. In closing, this brings us to a third observation:

3. Make good memories and hold to the precious memories of days gone by.

I like what one reporter who wrote a story of the sugar cane sweetened Dr. Pepper said, "We like it because we are actually tasting a memory." As I look back, I am most thankful for the fellowship at the table when we drank sweet tea. I like the memory of my first job as a paperboy, which afforded me the opportunity to buy myself and perhaps a friend and ice-cold Coca-Cola. It was a good reminder that it pays to work hard. I like the memory that comes to me when we enjoyed the surroundings of relatives in East Texas where the Baptists drank Dr. Pepper and were not ashamed to be t-totalers. I am still not ashamed! *"Drink the sweet...for the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Nehemiah 8:10). Our joy does not come in a bottle, it comes from the Lord. We raise our proverbial cup to celebrate Him and the good He has done for us, not the substance in the bottle.

- Pastor Pope -

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