

Anointed for the Witness of Jesus

“I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

—Revelation 20:4

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER

of Revelation follows what is depicted in the preceding chapters as the final overthrow of all that has been associated with Satan and his empire, particularly the false church systems, as represented by the harlot woman. There also is shown the overthrow of the forces instrumental in destroying the false “woman.” Beginning with the twentieth chapter, there is shown another series of events having to do with the establishment of a new

rulership on the earth, and the inauguration of true religion, based upon the knowledge of the true God. The “tabernacle of God” is at last seen to be with men. He deals with them, and they become his people.—Rev. 21:3

In the opening verses of Revelation 20, we have identified those who will reign with Christ in the new kingdom. The marks of identification are very interesting, being summed up under two headings. First, they were “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,” as stated in our opening text. In this witness, they are shown not to have been in any way associated with the false, beastly systems that had gone before. They had been witnesses only for Jesus, even unto death. Everything they possessed, even their own lives, they cast aside and accepted Jesus as their only head, and thus they died.

Second, they were “holy.” (vs. 6) The formula for attaining holiness, as suggested by Jesus, is a proper application of the Word of truth. Jesus prayed that his disciples might attain holiness—entire devotion to the cause of God. He said to his Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) As the sanctifying power of the Truth lays hold upon the individuals who make up this class, it brings about a condition of true holiness. As this condition of holiness is gradually attained, these individuals find themselves in the position of being witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God—that is, co-laborers with God.

THESE QUALIFICATIONS STILL NECESSARY

It is these same qualifications by which we today, as followers of the Master, may hope to be among those who will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. Inasmuch as it is our privilege to be living at the very time when the destructive forces outlined in the preceding chapters of Revelation are tearing

down Satan's rulership over the earth, how very important it is now to give earnest consideration to the conditions upon which we may have a part with Christ in his kingdom. These conditions center in copying the "mind of Christ," and emulating his "witness . . . for the word of God."

Jesus was indeed a faithful witness. He laid down his life bearing witness of his Father and declaring the Word of truth, the Gospel of the kingdom. In doing this, he carried out the commission that had been given to him through the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. This comes to our attention very early in the experiences of the Master, when he was in the synagogue at Nazareth and was given the Old Testament scriptures to read, as was the custom. He turned to Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 61, and upon reading a portion of the first two verses, claimed that this statement was the authority for the ministry upon which he was then embarking. Isaiah's prophecy states: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."—Isa. 61:1,2; Luke 4:18,19

Jesus did all of these things because he was commissioned to do so by the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. The footstep followers of the Master are members of his body. This is why the Revelator saw them as those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. They had accepted him as their head, in place of their own, and thus had become members of his body. The anointing of the Spirit, therefore,

that came upon the head, is effective for every member of his body. Hence, this royal commission from heaven applies to these, even as it applied to Jesus. This means that if we, as footstep followers of the Master, desire to live up to all of our spiritual privileges, having the same mind as he did, we must also obey this commission of the Spirit.

As we consider the privileges of our anointing to be witnesses for Jesus, it is important that we realize this is not the only work associated with the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Thus, busying ourselves in witnessing for the Truth should never be done to the jeopardy of any other aspect of our spiritual interests. Indeed, the spiritual life of the Christian is made up of a number of elements. We are begotten of the Spirit—there is an energy in us, a new hope of life, which the Holy Spirit begets, nourishes, and builds up. The Holy Spirit is said also to seal us. That is to say, the promises of God that are recorded in his Word, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, give us God's assurance of victory. The Holy Spirit is also said to bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Not the least in importance, however, the Holy Spirit of God also anoints us to work and witness for Jesus, and if we neglect this anointing influence we are not living up to all of our spiritual responsibilities and privileges.

Notice again how this witnessing commission begins: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me." This would mean that if we are not living up to what the anointing signifies, the Spirit of the Lord is not fully "upon" us. To ignore this anointing, or to count it as of secondary importance, or upon the

basis of some fanciful theory which we develop to decide that the commission associated with the anointing of the Spirit no longer is effective or needed in the christian life, means that we are resisting the power of God. Paul likens this to grieving, and possibly quenching, the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.—Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19

The term “anointing” is the Bible illustration by which God tells us that he authorizes and commissions us by his Holy Spirit to go to work for him and his son, Christ Jesus our Lord—to be coworkers with them. Therefore, in bearing witness to the Truth, we are partners with God, Jesus, and even with one another, as we work together forwarding God’s great plan of salvation, by which the whole world is to be reconciled to him in due time.

PREACHING TO THE MEEK

“The LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” Notice, we are commissioned to preach good tidings only to the meek. We are not to force the gospel message upon anyone, or attempt to impose it upon the consciences of the people. We are merely to preach good tidings to the meek—that is, to those who are willing to listen. How are we to do this? The Scriptures give us the proper methods. We are to “sow beside all waters.” (Isa. 32:20) We are also informed that in the morning we are to sow the seed and in the evening to withhold not our hands. (Eccles. 11:6) God has made it plain that if we thus proclaim the glad tidings as far and wide as we possibly can, then he will direct the issue as to the number of meek ones who will be reached and blessed thereby. Thus, we are to

proclaim the glad tidings even in the “evening.” We are pretty far into the evening now, but this is no excuse for ceasing to bear witness to the Truth.

Inasmuch as the Lord thus gives us the commission to continue preaching even at the very time when the dark night is settling down upon the world, it evidently means that there are still a few meek ones to be found—one here and one there. We may not know where these are to be found, but if we sow the Truth beside all waters, God will see that it reaches those whom he desires to call—he “giveth the increase.” (I Cor. 3:7) It is for us to be faithful in proclaiming the message by every means possible, to sow the seed in the morning and in the evening, and beside all waters, everywhere, and let God take care of the results. This is God’s command through his Word, and it has a direct application upon our being “beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.”

Some may say, what good does it do to bear witness to the Truth? This is not the time for converting the world. True, this is not the time for converting the world, but it is the time to witness to the world, and this witness is to be given to the world whether they hear or whether they forbear. We might just as well ask, what results did Jesus’ witnessing produce? Jesus laid down his life witnessing for the Truth, as he was commissioned to do, but not because he expected immediate results. We are to do the same, because the same royal commission of God likewise applies to us. How blessed it is to be conscious of the fact that we are guided and strengthened by the same instructions of the Holy Spirit as was our Master and Head.

Jesus bore witness to the Truth right down to the very end of his earthly life. When Pilate asked him if he were a king, he replied, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18:37) On Calvary's cross, with his last breath almost spent, Jesus preached the wonderful hope of the kingdom. (Luke 23:42,43) Throughout the years of his ministry, he used his strength to perform those remarkable miracles that illustrated the message he was proclaiming.

So we might well ask, what results did Jesus have? Did he convert the Jewish masses? No, he did not. In fact, just five days before his crucifixion he wept over Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."—Luke 13:34,35

Did Jesus convert Pilate? No, but he witnessed powerfully to him! Did Jesus convert the gainsaying crowd that heaped ridicule upon him as he hung upon the cross? He certainly did not, but he bore witness to them nevertheless. After the Master had said that the hour of darkness had come, still he continued to fulfill the terms of his anointing, even unto death. It was only his death that stopped him from witnessing "for the word of God."

We are also to work until the "night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4) This does not mean that we are to arbitrarily decide when the night comes, and on this basis conclude that it is time to stop witnessing to the Truth. God's instruction is

to keep on until “no man can work.” Additionally, we are not to be concerned about how much good it will do, or the present results. We are not to expect such rewards for our service this side of the veil. If we are willing to serve the Lord only if he shows us immediate results for our labors, then we do not have the Spirit of Christ. God does not want this kind of service.

THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION

“He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” These expressions, while telling us to whom it is our privilege to bear witness, also outline the nature of the message we are to proclaim. As we analyze these statements, they reveal that one of the great fundamentals of the kingdom message is the fact that it holds out a hope of resurrection from the dead.

If we should remove from our message the hope of the resurrection of the dead, we would have no message at all worth talking about. We would have no message of comfort for the church, and nothing wherewith we could bind up the brokenhearted in the world—nothing that would give the hope of “liberty to the captives.” The apostle says that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then our faith is vain, our preaching is vain, and we are found “false witnesses.”—I Cor. 15:13-15

Thus the apostle informs us that the true witnesses of Jesus are those who proclaim the message of the resurrection of the dead. This is true not only concerning our hope, the hope of Christ’s footstep followers, but it is equally true respecting hope

for the world of mankind. Paul outlines the fact that in our suffering with Christ, in our being held “in jeopardy every hour,” it is because we are being baptized with Jesus “for the dead”—that is, for the eventual benefit of the dead world of mankind. (I Cor. 15:29,30) If the dead world is not to be resurrected, then this “death-baptism” of the true witnesses for Jesus is in vain.

Certainly the kingdom message which we are commissioned to preach is one that must, if it has God’s approval, have incorporated in it the hope of restitution, “spoken by the mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21) This restitution—a complete restoration of man to the perfection that was lost in Eden—has as its centerpiece the glorious resurrection hope for the world of mankind. Thus, even if our witness for Jesus produces little or no results as far as gathering those who might accept the present Gospel Age call to sacrifice, we are to rejoice in the fact that many will be comforted by the seeds of hope which we can sow concerning man’s future resurrection prospects.

THE ACCEPTED TIME

Jesus was also anointed to “proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Here is that part of the message that has to do with Jesus’ footstep followers of the present time. Jesus began the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord. So far as he was concerned it began at the time of his consecration. For his followers it began at Pentecost. While the dark night appears to be close at hand, and certainly much closer when compared to the days of the

Early Church, yet we still enjoy the privilege of proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord.

Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord simply means holding out the hope of the High Calling. This is based upon the fact that during the Gospel Age God accepts the sacrifices of his saints, counting them “holy and acceptable,” because they are offered through Christ, and also because they are offered in the “acceptable year.” Paul says, “Now is the accepted time” for the calling, selection, and development of Christ’s body members.—II Cor. 6:2

Are we still to preach this? Yes—there is nothing in the Scriptures that cancels this part of the commission. Only when this work is completed will the night settle in “when no man can work.” In our study of God’s plan, we have learned to know enough about him to realize that he is a God of order, a God of power, and that he has his entire plan completely in hand. We can note with what definiteness the High Calling was opened up to the Early Church. There was no guesswork about it. This age of sacrifice was begun so definitely that there was no doubt in the minds of the Early Church about it.

Can we suppose that at the end of the age God would withdraw his overruling providence with respect to the message of truth, and permit his zealous people to continue preaching the acceptable year of the Lord after he had closed the door to enter therein? Would he permit any to have engendered in their hearts this hope of winning the prize if there were no such hope? Would God allow himself to be placed in a position where he would need to explain that his people had no right

to preach the High Calling—that he had no place in the body of Christ for those who had thus been inspired by his truth?

Can we imagine God running his affairs like this? Most emphatically—no! The Gospel message pertaining to the acceptable year of the Lord started out definitely, just when God wanted it to. Likewise, when this time comes to an end, and there is no further opportunity for spirit-begetting, we may expect it to stop just as definitely. God will not permit us to preach this acceptable year of the Lord when that door is closed. The very fact that we find dear ones still offering themselves in full consecration to the Lord means that this time has not yet come, and we are to continue proclaim this acceptable year. It is still a part of our commission.

THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

The Master did not quote further from the commission of Isaiah 61:1-3, and wisely so, because the next part did not apply to him while in the flesh. It reads, “To proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God.” (vs. 2) This “day of vengeance” was outlined in the prophecies as the period of trouble at this end of the age that brings about the overthrow of Satan’s empire. It was not the due time in Jesus’ day to proclaim it, but we are now living in that day of vengeance. The hand of God is heavy upon the nations, and because it is we see throughout the world exactly what the Master stated would be the condition, namely, that all the tribes of the earth are mourning because of him. (Matt. 24:30) It is these mourning ones that we are to endeavor to comfort with the kingdom message.

To declare the day of vengeance does not at all imply the thought of pronouncing vengeance—"Vengeance is mine, . . . saith the Lord." (Rom. 12:19) Our proclaiming the day of vengeance is simply giving the Bible explanation of the significance of what is taking place in the world—that the time has come for God to rid the world of Satan's corrupt dominion, so that Christ's kingdom of righteousness can be established. It is the hope of this glorious remedy that brings comfort to those who otherwise would be bewildered and mourning. When we see it from this viewpoint, the day of vengeance message is the most blessed, the most encouraging, the most cheering one that God's people ever had the privilege of proclaiming.

MOURNERS IN ZION

There is still another part of the commission, namely, "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning." (Isa. 61:3) If we apply this to the systems of Christendom, we would all agree that there is plenty of mourning going on there—perhaps more than at any previous time, because these systems are failing. Millions who have had the idea that the church would convert the world, and that civilization was reaching ever higher levels, are losing faith. They are seeking an answer to the unexpected developments in today's world. Today, indeed, orthodoxy means very little, because these disillusioned ones realize it cannot furnish the answer to their problems. The Truth, however, does furnish the answer, and it is our privilege to proclaim it to as many of these mourning ones as we can.

There is even a more vital application of this commission to comfort those who “mourn in Zion,” and that is to the true Zion, the Lord’s true people. It is to these, especially, that we are commissioned to “give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isa. 61:3) Many of the Lord’s consecrated people are “mourning” in the sense that they are going through severe trials—trials of health, of job, of family, of financial distress, and of other difficulties which burden them greatly. Indeed, we have the promise that the Lord will not allow us to be tested and tried above what we are able to bear—yet, because we are still tabernacled in the flesh, we sometimes “mourn” under these hard experiences. As fellow-brethren, we are commissioned to “appoint” to those so burdened encouraging words of “beauty,” “joy,” and “praise,” that they might be spiritually lifted up from the “ashes,” “mourning,” and “heaviness” of heart which trouble them.

That these dear ones now mourning in Zion are the Lord’s people, is shown in the fact that they are called in this same verse “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” Yes, they are the planting of the Lord—a part of the “wheat” class—the remaining members thereof presently being prepared and developed. Surely we cannot conclude that the great majority of those thus “mourning in Zion” will, in the final picture, turn out to be merely tares. Rather, God is permitting these severe tests to come upon his people. By these, he is teaching each of us the lesson of individual obedience and faithfulness to our

consecration vows. He is teaching us to stand with him in our hour of trial.

Some need a helping hand to stand—we should consider it a privilege to extend ours to them in the hour of their trial. Let us not conclude that those who may be mourning in Zion are not the planting of the Lord. It is our privilege to lay down our lives for these because they are our brethren. Indeed, we have a glorious privilege in such experiences to carry out the commandment of Jesus—to love one another as he loved us.

If we are faithful in doing this, and in witnessing the Truth to all as we have opportunity, the Lord will bless us. In such a course of faithfulness to him, we can have the confidence that this is what God's Holy Spirit has commissioned us to do. By obeying this commission in its true spirit, we will be among those who are "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," and who will "live and reign with Christ a thousand years." ■