

Jesus—Faithful Unto Death

*“Even hereunto
were ye called:
because Christ also
suffered for us,
leaving us an
example, that ye
should follow his
steps: Who did no
sin, neither was
guile found in his
mouth: Who, when
he was reviled,
reviled not again;
when he suffered,
he threatened not;
but committed
himself to him that
judgeth
righteously.”*

—I Peter 2:21-23

THIS IS THE SEASON OF

the year in which God’s consecrated people come together to keep the Memorial of our Lord’s death. As we do so, it is appropriate that we call to mind the perfect example which he set for us in every aspect of life and character. Meaningful glimpses into Jesus’ faithfulness during his brief earthly ministry are brought to our attention in connection with his trial, first before the religious leaders of his day, and then before the civil authorities.

Following the Master’s arrest in Gethsemane he was taken before the high priest. Jesus was asked by the high priest to tell about his disciples and of his doctrine. Doubtless the high priest thought that in complying with this request

he would say something which could be construed as blasphemy.

Jesus' reply to this request is revealing. He said, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why asketh thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said." (John 18:19-21) Jesus had not waited until the close of his life to bear witness to the Truth. A faithful witness before the high priest would not in itself have proven the Master's faithfulness, although it was a fitting climax to his entire faithful ministry of the Truth.

Jesus came to be "the light of the world." To fulfill this function it was essential that he let his light shine by teaching the people the great truths of his Father's plan. He faithfully did this from the beginning of his ministry. While only a minority of those to whom Jesus witnessed ever accepted and acted upon his teaching, they had learned about them to such an extent that he believed the high priest could have his question answered simply by asking the Jewish public.

This was undoubtedly true. The psalmist, in a prophecy concerning Jesus, puts these words in his mouth: "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation."—Ps. 40:9,10

The high priest was not satisfied with Jesus' answer, so he questioned him further. Matthew

reports him as saying, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus' reply to this was simply, "Thou hast said." (Matt. 26:63,64) This is what the high priest wanted to hear from the Master, for in his view it made Jesus subject to death for blasphemy. Jesus knew this, yet he did not hesitate to bear witness to the Truth under these trying circumstances, even as he had been faithful in declaring the kingdom message throughout his ministry.

BEFORE PILATE

When Jesus was subsequently brought before Pilate he was asked to testify as to what his activities had been. "What hast thou done?" Pilate asked. (John 18:35) Pilate was not concerned with the religious aspects of the issue. There was a considerable degree of religious liberty throughout the Roman empire at that time. It was all right with Pilate even if Jesus did claim to be the Son of God. However, the accusation brought to Pilate was that Jesus claimed to be a king. This was different. If Jesus were aspiring to be a king it would be treason against Caesar. This Pilate could not ignore.

When Pilate asked Jesus, "What hast thou done?" the question was designed to learn if Jesus had been seeking to establish himself as king of the Jews. Jesus sensed this and replied to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (vs. 36) This was clear reasoning, and it was obvious to Pilate that Jesus was no threat to the solidarity of the Roman Empire.

Pilate continued his questioning, asking, "Art thou a king then?" (vs. 37) While Jesus had explained that his kingdom was not of this world, he fearlessly affirmed his kingship. He replied to Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Having so unhesitatingly committed himself to the fact that he was born to be a king, there was nothing Pilate could do to save Jesus, although he testified that he could find no fault in this man.

Here again we find Jesus climaxing his life of faithfulness with this final testimony which he knew would lead to the cross. While Jesus had not raised an army or in other ways sought to establish himself as a king, he had done much in preparation for his kingdom and to illustrate what the kingdom would mean to the people when it was established. Any other prisoner before the bar, if asked what he had done, would probably have said, "I have done nothing." Jesus did not thus reply to Pilate. He simply explained that his kingdom was not of this world. In reality, Jesus had spent three and one-half years doing preparatory work for that future kingdom.

Jesus had committed no crimes that could be justly charged against him. On the contrary, he had been active in doing good. He had healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, cast out demons, opened blind eyes, and raised the dead. Equally praiseworthy were the gracious messages of Truth which he had uttered. These were messages which had helped to loose the shackles of superstition which had been fastened upon the Israelites by their hypocritical leaders. These works of grace and goodness were

appreciated by many of the common people. They heard him gladly. Indeed, his popularity rose to the point where the Pharisees became fearful that if he were left alone the whole world would become his followers.—Matt. 4:23-25; John 11:47,48; 12:19

This is why Jesus was hated by those whose positions of power and authority in the nation were jeopardized by his teachings and his works of righteousness. As members of the fallen race, motivated by selfishness and unrighteous ambitions, they were unable to understand and appreciate the Master's selfless viewpoint and his untiring zeal for the blessing of others. To them Jesus was a misfit, one whose precepts and example exposed their unrighteousness and in time might prevent their selfish practices. They wanted to put a stop to his going about doing good because they selfishly desired to continue their own practice of doing evil. Their cry was, "Crucify him, Crucify him."—John 19:6

SIMPLICITY IN SERVICE

The spirit of selfishness which motivated Israel's leaders was further manifested in their planned effort to make sure that what little good they selfishly did should be seen and heard of men. It was not so with Jesus. The Spirit of God which filled his life promoted a beautiful simplicity and straightforwardness in what he did, which was calculated to divert attention from himself and to direct it toward his Heavenly Father, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

When the centurion came to Jesus informing him that his servant was "at home sick of the palsy," Jesus' simple reply was, "I will come and heal

him.” (Matt. 8:6,7) There was no bargaining, no request that the miracle be publicized, no hint that the centurion, by accepting this favor, would be placed under obligation. Nor was there any attempt to wrest from him a pledge of future support. Jesus’ promise to heal the centurion’s servant was an expression of his loving desire to do good for the glory of God.

Matthew 8:14 reads, “When Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever.” Again there was no show, no unnecessary ado. Here was a woman who needed help, and Jesus helped her. Indeed, the Master had come into the world that eventually through him all might have health and life. Why should the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law be anything extraordinary for him to do? He did not so consider it, so we read that “he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose.”—vs. 15

DID NOT SEEK POPULARITY

In Matthew 8:16,17, we read, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” It seems that although Jesus made no effort to acquaint the people with his miracle-working power, his fame spread. By the close of this day he found himself the center of attraction and his popularity increasing. That the Master was not seeking this result from the good he was doing is apparent from verse 18, which

reads, "Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side."

The plan of God reveals that in due time all men will be drawn to Jesus, that he is the true light which yet is to enlighten every man that cometh into the world. Jesus was not desirous that the multitudes at that time be drawn to him. He did not want them to be attracted merely because of the temporary blessings he was able to bestow upon them. The drawing of all men in due time is based upon the fact that Jesus would be lifted up as man's Redeemer. This supreme example of love, even the sacrificing of life that the world might have forgiveness of sin, will be the real drawing power for those who come unto God through Jesus. To have divine favor, it is necessary not only to appreciate the unselfish sacrifice of the Master, but to partake of the spirit of unselfish love which prompted it.

UNTIRING SERVICE

The good works of the Master were not occasional incidents, but his life's habit. He was never too occupied to give heed to the needs of those who came to him for help. Not only did he use the miracle-working power of God which was at his command to heal the sick and raise the dead, but he gave of his own strength as well. So unselfishly and generously did he thus give, that his perfect human body was practically worn out at the close of his short ministry of three and one-half years.

In a general way, Jesus' ministry was on behalf of all Israel. In this respect, he considered it a

privilege to do good unto all as later suggested by the Apostle Paul. (Gal. 6:10) However, he was particularly interested in his immediate disciples. These were being prepared to carry forward the work of the Gospel Age after the Master returned to heaven. A part of their training was in the observance of his life of unselfishness, in which he was fully committed to giving his attention and energy on behalf of others.

IN HIS STEPS

Jesus said to his disciples, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do.” (John 14:12) Those who are filled with the Master’s spirit of self-sacrifice and are faithful in following him into death by laying down their lives for others will, in the kingdom, share with him in the work of healing all the sick and raising all the dead. The healing of the sick in that day will be permanent. Those who are awakened from the sleep of death shall have the opportunity of living forever if they will be obedient to God’s laws. Thus, all the true followers of Jesus will share with him in doing works far greater than those which he performed at his First Advent.

Even now, and in order that we may demonstrate the spirit by which we are controlled, God gives us the opportunity as ministers of the Word to do all we can toward the opening of spiritually blind eyes and unstopping spiritually deaf ears. We also now have use of the Word of reconciliation to cleanse away the leprosy of sin. Those dead in trespasses and sins may even now, by accepting the Gospel message as proclaimed by the members of the body

of Christ, be awakened to righteousness and have their mortal bodies quickened by the Holy Spirit to serve the living God.

As in the days of Jesus, those at the present time who zealously lay down their lives in seeking to bless their fellow men will not be held in high esteem by the religiously influential of our time. It is far better that the servant of God have the reproaches of the world heaped upon him because of doing good than to have to confess that, having been called out of darkness into the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ, he had done nothing about it so far as proclaiming the message to others was concerned.

Jesus was hailed before Pilate because he had spent his life doing good in the Father's way. He had preached unpopular truth and had exposed popular error. Now the pent-up animosity of Israel's religious leaders was being heaped upon him. He was rushed to Calvary, not because he had done wrong, but because he had spent his life doing good.

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

It would be a tragedy, indeed, for any follower of Christ to suffer on account of his own wrongdoing. Christian suffering is an evidence of God's favor, one of the witnesses of the Spirit. However, we should not confuse Christian suffering with suffering for foolish things we might do. Christian suffering is the result of faithfulness in showing forth the praises of the Lord through the proclamation of the great truths of God's plan.

It would also be tragic for a Christian, in order to avoid the ill will of the world or to maintain a

respectable standing in his community, to refrain from faithfulness in proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom. There is no other proper course for followers of the Master to take than to emulate his example of faithfulness. Jesus was consumed by the zeal of his Father's house, a zeal for doing good. It was a zeal for manifesting the same example of divine love which had prompted the Father to send him into the world, that the world through him might have life. For us not to be governed by this viewpoint would manifest a lack of the Holy Spirit, that divine influence and energy by which the faithful followers of the Master are conformed more and more into his image.

The Apostle Peter, through his association with the Master, observed the unselfishness of his life of sacrifice. He saw the wisdom of his methods and learned well the lesson of love which leads to the laying down of life for others. Peter expressed himself on the subject, saying, "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."—I Pet. 2:20-22

SUFFERING WITH HIM

We should note well the many scriptures which emphasize that we shall reign with Christ only if we suffer with him. Let us also remember that the only suffering which is acceptable is suffering for doing good, not for doing evil, nor for merely doing nothing.

When we suffer for the Lord's cause and take it patiently and with rejoicing, we are thereby demonstrating our wholehearted devotion to God and to the spirit of divine love which must rule supreme in all those who will be blessed with life everlasting.

It will be the church's privilege during Christ's Millennial kingdom to instruct the world in the way of holiness. Hence, all its members must qualify in advance to share in such a glorious program of education, a program by which the knowledge of the glory of God will be caused to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. The world of mankind, while being restored to perfection, will not be called upon to suffer for doing good. They will, however, need to learn and to practice the principle of love in their dealings with others.

This is revealed in the Master's explanation of the parable of the sheep and the goats. To those who qualify as "sheep" in this parable the statement is made, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34) Jesus explains that the basis for the acceptableness of these "sheep" is the fact that they had manifested an interest in others. They had not busied themselves in acts of kindness in the hope of receiving a reward, but had cooperated in the restitution work then in progress because they had imbibed the spirit of God who had planned it.

These "sheep" had been so wholehearted in the manifestation of the love which ruled in their hearts that they were surprised to learn that what they had been doing had earned God's approval, and the privilege of entering into everlasting life in

the restored paradise. Although we say “earned,” life was actually provided for them through the ransom. However, by their faithfulness in displaying the characteristics of divine love in their lives, they proved worthy to enter into the life which had been purchased for them by the blood of Christ.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Bringing the example of Jesus’ faithfulness back to ourselves, Pilate’s question to the Master, “What hast thou done?” serves as a reminder that there is indeed something good for us to be doing. By engaging ourselves in so doing we will prove worthy to suffer with Christ now, and later to live and reign with him.

We cannot hope to do some of the things that Jesus did. We cannot perform miracles. We cannot raise the dead. We cannot even teach and speak as he did. Surely we cannot be a perfect example in every way such as he was. We can, however, have the same heart dedication as he did. We can say with him, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Ps. 40:8) The Scriptures also tell us of the works we can do which he will accept. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” “We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.”—Gal. 6:10; I John 3:16; John 13:14

These and many other scriptures remind us that there is much work we can engage in which is acceptable to God, with the help and guiding influence of his Holy Spirit. It is up to us to seek out ways to be so engaged. If and when the question is ever asked

of us, “What hast thou done?” let us be able to testify that we have, to the best of our ability, done heartily what the Lord has asked us to do. At this Memorial season, let us remember with solemn thankfulness the great example of Jesus, our Pass-over Lamb, and the privilege we have of following in his steps even unto death. “Hallelujah! what a Savior!” ■