

“A Faithful Saying”

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

—II Timothy 2:11,12

PAUL’S SECOND LETTER

to Timothy was written in prison at Rome. (II Tim. 1:16,17) He was nearing the end of the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering, and was quite “ready to be offered,” or to complete the offering which he began when it was pointed out to him by Ananias “how great things” he would be called upon to suffer for the “name’s sake” of his Lord. (II Tim. 4:6; Acts 9:16) Paul had admonished others to present their bodies a living sacrifice, and he had never held back from offering his own.—Rom. 12:1

From the beginning of his walk in the narrow way until the very end, which he had now reached, Paul had never wavered. As a Christian soldier, he had “fought a good fight,” and he had “kept the faith.” An important part of that faith was his confidence in the promises of God which, in their composite testimony, Paul refers to in our text as

“a faithful saying.” These promises assured him that if he suffered and died with Jesus he would be rewarded with the high honor of living and reigning with him. That is why he could write with such assurance that a “crown of righteousness” was laid up for him which the “Lord, the righteous judge,” would give to him at “that day,” and not to him only, but “unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:7,8

Paul had such implicit confidence in that “faithful saying” that he did not permit anything to swerve him from his course of self-sacrifice, no matter how much toil and suffering might be involved. We have an inspiring example of this on the occasion when, having returned to Caesarea following his third missionary tour, the brethren there endeavored to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit had indicated that bonds and imprisonment awaited him there.—Acts 21:8-12

One less resolute in his determination to lay down his life in keeping with the terms of his consecration would gladly have taken the advice of his brethren and stayed away from Jerusalem. Paul, however, did not agree with his advisers. It is not clear from the record just why Paul was so convinced that it was the Lord’s will for him to visit Jerusalem on this occasion. We may be sure, though, that he was not acting presumptuously. As matters turned out, it was his experience in Jerusalem which resulted in his being taken to Rome under protective custody by the Gentiles.

The point to be emphasized is that Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem despite the fact that the Holy Spirit testified that bonds awaited him there.

Under the circumstances, the obvious conclusion to be reached by human reasoning would have been that the Lord did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem. However, this illustrates the possibility of interpreting the providences of God incorrectly, and to favor the inclinations of the flesh to avoid trouble.

Paul, though, was not guided by human reasoning. He was convinced that the Lord wanted him to visit Jerusalem at this time, so he interpreted the Holy Spirit's testimony as being a test of his fidelity and determination to fulfill the terms of his covenant of sacrifice. He said to his well-meaning but ill-informed advisers, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."—Acts 21:13

FAITHFULNESS LED TO DEATH

Paul was seized by a mob at Jerusalem, and but for the intervention of Roman soldiers he would have been killed by the Jews. He was arrested and became a prisoner. More than two years later, still as a prisoner, he had a long and much interrupted journey to Rome, during the course of which he suffered "perils in the sea" and of the land. (Acts 27:1-44; 28:1-16; II Cor. 11:25-27) Reaching Rome, he continued to be a prisoner for at least another two years, although he was granted the privilege of living in "his own hired house."—Acts 28:30,31

It is interesting and inspiring to read the account of Paul's experiences in being brought before kings, in traveling from place to place, in witnessing to prison guards, in being attacked by mobs, and in faithfully preaching the Gospel wherever he went.

All this he did without regard to how much it must often have been “out of season” for him to let his light shine. (II Tim. 4:2) How often when reading these accounts do we fully take into consideration the physical hardships involved, the inconveniences experienced, the heartaches and the loneliness entailed in the conduct of such a faithful ministry? How many of us today would be willing voluntarily to follow a similar course of privation and hardship?

There is always the danger of interpreting the Lord’s will in terms of which course in life will contribute most to our comfort, and result in the least difficulty and trial. God’s direction for any of us might well result in experiences which are pleasant to the flesh at times, even as his will on other occasions might lead to great sacrifice and suffering. The deciding factor, however, is not how we will be affected, but what the Lord wants us to do, and that decision must be reached through the guidance of his Word.

THE WAY OF SACRIFICE

We may be sure that Paul based his decisions upon the basic teachings of God’s Word concerning the privilege of the consecrated to suffer and to die with Jesus, inspired with the hope of living and reigning with him. The “faithful saying” he refers to in our text is in reality a teaching, or doctrine. Paul is not referring to any single statement or quotation, but to the general teaching of the Bible on this subject, testimony which is clearly set forth in both the Old and New Testaments.

These are “faithful” teachings, or as the Greek text puts it, “trustworthy.” We can put our trust in

these promises of God, for he is faithful, declares the apostle. (Heb. 10:23) To Paul the promises of God were so sure, and they set before him such a radiant joy, that he was given strength, even as Jesus was, to endure the cross and to despise the shame, which his course of faithfulness brought upon him. (Heb. 12:2) Having full confidence in the trustworthiness of God's promises, he counted his afflictions as "light" and of momentary duration when compared with the "eternal weight of glory" assured by the faithful saying of God's Word.—II Cor. 4:17,18

"LIKE ONE OF THE PRINCES"

The faithful saying, or teaching, concerning the rich reward which will be given to those who suffer and die with Jesus, is beautifully set forth in Psalm 82:6-8. In these verses the footstep followers of Jesus are prophetically referred to as "gods." Jesus quotes this passage and applies it to those "unto whom the word of God came."—John 10:34,35

In this reference, Jesus also reminds us that "the scripture cannot be broken." In other words, it is a faithful saying upon which we can depend. The Word of God was provided especially for the footstep followers of the Master during the present age. Jesus knew this, and in a later reference to his disciples he said, "I have given them thy word."—John 17:14

The words of the Psalm from which Jesus quoted represent God's prophetic declaration, and read as follows, "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." It may seem strange that gods should "die like men, and fall like one of

the princes,” especially since they are the “children of the Most High.” However, the fact that they do go into death like “one of the princes,” namely Jesus, is one of the evidences that they are children of God. Perhaps Paul had this very passage in mind when he wrote, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ... if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:16,17

It is important that we note the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words which are translated “gods” in Psalm 82:6 and in Jesus’ words found in John 10:34. The Hebrew word used by the psalmist is *Elohim*. Although it often has reference to God, the Almighty Creator, its meaning also denotes “rulers,” “judges,” “godlike ones,” and “special possessions of God.” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions*) In Jesus’ quote of this Psalm, the Greek word *theos* is translated “gods.” In similar fashion, though *theos* is often used in the New Testament with reference to the Heavenly Father, it is also translated “godly” several times—some examples being II Corinthians 1:12; 7:9-11; 11:2; and I Timothy 1:4. Thus, we are able to understand why both the psalmist and Jesus refer to “gods” as applying to those who are striving to have their lives conform to the godly principals embodied in the Heavenly Father and in his son, Christ Jesus.

Indeed, these “gods” die. As the world looks on, they see nothing in their life of sacrifice essentially different from the manner in which all mankind is dying. Any difference the world might see is not, as a rule, considered commendable, rather the reverse. These godly ones lay down their lives in the service

of their Creator, letting their light shine. The darkness hateth the light, however, and the sacrifices of these are often considered unnecessary and fanatical.

This is not the viewpoint of our Heavenly Father, for “precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” (Ps. 116:15) In I Peter 1:19 we read about the “precious blood of Christ,” by which we were redeemed. It is not difficult to understand that Jesus’ work of sacrifice, as illustrated by his shed blood, was precious in God’s sight, but it is almost staggering to our faith to read that our Heavenly Father looks upon our sacrifice in the same way.

Paul understood this viewpoint of the faithful saying, and that is why he wrote in Romans 6:10,11, that we should “reckon” ourselves to be dead “unto sin” in the same manner as Jesus “died unto sin.” Earlier, in verse 5 of this chapter, Paul explains that we are “planted together in the likeness” of Jesus’ death, and in verses 10 and 11 he is merely detailing what is involved in that likeness.

Certainly, however, we as fallen human beings have no life of our own which could be considered “precious” in God’s sight. It is only valuable because the life we “now live” is the one we receive through faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer. (Gal. 2:20) Since God authorizes us to reckon the matter thus, let us rejoice the more in the faithful saying, and endeavor daily to be loyal to our covenant of sacrifice.

TO REIGN WITH HIM

Jesus’ reference to the 82nd Psalm is in keeping with his statements as the risen Lord, when he instructed John the Revelator to write to the Christian churches: “Be thou faithful unto death, and

I will give thee a crown of life.” “He that overcometh, ... to him will I give power over the nations.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 2:10,26; 3:21) Indeed, faithful Christians are promised to come forth in the “first resurrection,” to be “priests of God and of Christ,” and to “reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:6

Peter reminds us that the faithful saying, or teaching of the Lord concerning the sacrifices of this age, and the exaltation to which they lead, was testified by the Spirit through the prophets. He speaks of it as “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11) When Peter was with Jesus in the flesh it was very difficult for him to be reconciled to the viewpoint that one should suffer for doing good. With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, however, he grasped the true significance of this phase of God’s plan, both as it related to Jesus and also the fact that his footstep followers have the privilege of suffering with him.

The “glory that should follow” faithfulness in suffering and dying with Jesus is what the “exceeding great and precious promises” meant to him, and should mean to us, whereby we will be “partakers of the divine nature,” if we remain steadfast unto the end. (II Pet. 1:4) Like Paul, Peter considered these promises to be faithful sayings upon which the followers of the Master can depend. They encouraged and inspired him to faithfulness, knowing that “even hereunto” he was called, “because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”—I Pet. 2:21

“THIS ONE THING I DO”

Paul was inspired and encouraged by the faithful sayings of God from the beginning to the end of his ministry. During his first imprisonment in Rome he wrote to the Philippian brethren about it, saying to them that he counted everything else in life as “loss” compared with the prospect of winning Christ and being a joint-heir in his kingdom. Furthermore, it was perfectly clear to him that the attainment of such high glory with his Lord was possible only through “fellowship” in his sufferings, and being made “conformable unto his death.”—Phil. 3:7-14

At this point in his Christian life, Paul did not feel as though he had fully “attained” that for which he had been “apprehended of Christ Jesus.” He did not know if he would soon reach the end of the way, or whether his trial period was nearly over. Earlier in his ministry Paul had admonished the Galatian brethren not to become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) He had written to the brethren at Corinth that those who were too sure of their standing should “take heed” lest they fall. (I Cor. 10:12) He knew that he was a man of “like passions” as the brethren to whom he wrote. (Acts 14:15) Since Paul did not know if the time was near when his earthly walk would be ending, he was not in a position to express himself too confidently.

However, Paul did not intend to relax his effort. Whether the remaining time of his earthly ministry was long or short, he intended to apply himself wholly to this “one thing” of pressing toward “the mark of the prize for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13,14) In doing this, he would continue to bring his fleshly body “into subjection,”

lest after having preached to others he should himself be disapproved.—I Cor. 9:27

The Apostle Paul had served long and faithfully, and at the cost of much weariness, hardship, persecution and suffering. Now the most severe test of all was upon him. Many of the brethren with whom he served, and who could have been such a comfort to him in this hour of need, had turned against him. Some, perhaps, feared that identity with Paul would lead to their own imprisonment and death.—II Tim. 1:15; 4:10,16

We do not know all the details of the trial through which the apostle was passing, but it is evident that at the time he wrote this epistle he had already learned that he would soon be executed. He had said earlier in his Christian life that he was willing to die in Jerusalem for his Master. Then, however, he was not killed, for Roman soldiers were there and rescued him, so his affirmation of loyalty was not put fully to the test. Now it was different. The leaders of Rome were prepared to take his life, rather than save it, and the end was certain. Paul did not waver. “I am now ready to be offered,” he wrote, for “the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”—II Tim. 4:6,7

Had the apostle held back in the face of this final test, he could not have written so confidently. He had passed all the tests up to this point, and had not wavered. He was ready to gain complete victory, and therefore he wrote, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” (vs. 8) It was only by the strength of the Lord that Paul had received the news of his coming execution with courageous

valor befitting a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) With determination he had continued doing “this one thing,” and now he had “apprehended.” —Phil. 3:12,13

Even so, the great apostle knew that he needed the Lord to help him through these final hours just as he had leaned upon him throughout his entire pilgrim journey. He had learned to know his Lord: “I know whom I have believed,” he wrote, “and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (II Tim. 1:12) That final day would be when Paul’s earthly life came to an end and he would fall asleep in death until the return of the Lord and the exaltation to glory of all those who “love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:8

We can have no doubt that throughout Paul’s last hours he continued to be strengthened by that faithful saying which assured him, even as it also assures us, that “if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” (II Tim. 2:12) Paul did not deny the Lord even when doing so would have secured for him release from prison and from death. We know too that the Lord did not deny him, but stood by to strengthen and help him. Let us, therefore, keep and meditate upon the faithful sayings of the Word of God, that we, like Paul, might be faithful, “even unto death.” ■