

“A Corn of Wheat”

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

—*John 12:24*

THE SCRIPTURES HAD foretold that Jesus would suffer much at the hand of his enemies, eventually being put to death by them. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be “brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” (Isa. 53:7) However, Jesus was not under constant attack by his enemies during the entire period of his ministry. It is true that the religious leaders of Israel as a group were always opposed to the Master, although there were individuals even among these who were inclined to be kindly disposed toward him—Nicodemus, a Pharisee, being one of them.

The rank and file of the people of Israel were favorably impressed by Jesus’ ministry. They heard him gladly, and rejoiced in the many blessings they received at his hands. Indeed, it was this popularity among the common people that stirred up the jealousy of the religious rulers against the Master. This was particularly so toward the close of his ministry,

when Jesus awakened Lazarus from the “sleep of death.” (Ps. 13:3; John 11:11-14) “Behold,” they said, “the world is gone after him.” (John 12:19) This miracle led to a determination on the part of the religious leaders in Israel that Jesus must be put to death.—vss. 9-11

Among those who had heard of Jesus’ miracle in raising Lazarus from the dead were “certain Greeks.” These may have been Jews who lived in Greece, or they could have been proselytes to the Jewish faith. In any event, they asked to see Jesus. (vss. 20,21) These Greeks presented their request to Philip, who in turn spoke to Andrew, and then the two of them spoke to the Master. Jesus then stated, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.” To this, he added the words of our opening text, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”—vss. 23,24

This might seem a strange response to those who had requested an audience with Jesus. However, when we keep in mind God’s great plan of salvation, it is quite logical. The Greeks who wished to see him had doubtless been impressed by what they had heard about him, and if they found that the reports concerning Jesus were true, they were willing to give their support to his cause.

However, this was not the sort of “fruit” for which Jesus was looking at the time. Even if he had continued his earthly ministry, implemented by miracles, until the whole world actually did accept him as their honored leader, nothing worthwhile would be accomplished, for the people would continue to die. Jesus came into the world to save

mankind from death—not temporarily, but permanently.

Jesus' miracles brought temporary blessings to some. Mary and Martha must have rejoiced to have their brother restored to them, and Lazarus himself was doubtless glad that he had been awakened from the sleep of death. However, later Lazarus died again. His sisters also died, as did all those whom Jesus had restored to health and life. This was not the great objective of Jesus' ministry. The miracles which brought him so much popularity were designed to show forth his coming kingdom glory, when all who believe and obey will be restored to permanent health and life, so that there "shall be no more death."—John 2:11; Rev. 21:4

In order for permanent salvation from death to reach the people through Jesus, it was necessary that he die, "the just for the unjust." (Acts 24:15; I Pet. 3:18) Even if the whole world had accepted Jesus as their leader and king, he would still have not accomplished the great objective of his ministry, unless he died to redeem the people from death. Jesus loved those Greeks who asked to see him. He loved them so much that he was ready to die for them. Since the due time of his death was indeed near, he took this opportunity of impressing upon the minds of his disciples that at the moment he had something more important to do than to build up a following.

MUCH FRUIT

In parabolic words, Jesus compares his life to a "corn of wheat" which, when it falls into the ground and dies, results in a plant which brings forth

“much fruit.” This is the natural process involved in producing a crop of wheat, and how beautifully it illustrates that which results from the death of Jesus. Think of the worldwide yield of “fruit” that will result from his death, the death which involved the giving of his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) All the “ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10

The fruitage of Jesus’ death does not appear all at once. His faithful followers of the present age are “a kind of firstfruits” of this provision. (James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) “Afterfruits” will include the “great multitude”; then the Ancient Worthies—faithful ones of old—who will be brought forth in a “better resurrection”; and finally, the whole redeemed world of mankind, Jews and Gentiles. (Rev. 7:9; Heb. 11:35; I Tim. 2:4-6) While Jesus died alone on the cross, forsaken by all those who were for him in his popularity, and misunderstood even by his own disciples, nevertheless his death will lead to an abundant fruitage. Ultimately to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—Phil. 2:8-11

Jesus drew a considerable crowd of listeners during his earthly ministry, but this was not the important thing, so far as the plan of God for that time was concerned. Speaking of his death from another standpoint, Jesus said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32) John explains that in this statement Jesus was indicating what death he should die—that is, he would be “lifted up” upon a cross.—vs. 33

The people who were then being drawn to him did not comprehend what Jesus really meant. They sensed that he spoke of dying, but this they did not understand. How could Jesus die if he were truly the Christ of promise? To their understanding, the Messiah would never die. (John 12:34) Jesus did not attempt to explain further. He simply encouraged them to follow what light they could discern from his teachings, implying that if faithful to this, they would see greater light later, in God's due time. Then Jesus retired from the crowd, which, although having witnessed many of his miracles, did not actually believe on him with understanding.—vss. 35,36

TRUE BELIEVERS

The prophecies had foretold that the people as a whole would not believe on Jesus in the sense of becoming his true followers. (vss. 38-40) Jesus was not surprised at this, but he took occasion to point out to those who might then have an ear to hear, what would be involved in true discipleship. After explaining that “as a corn of wheat” he must die if fruitage was to result from his ministry, he added, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me [into death]; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”—vss. 25,26

Multitudes were ready at that time to acclaim Jesus as the miracle-working Messiah, but few indeed were willing to follow him into death—to be “planted together” with him as “wheat” in order

that they might together with him bring forth much fruitage through the blessing of all the families of the earth; yet this is the purpose of true Christian discipleship during the Gospel Age, the age in God's plan which was being introduced by Jesus.

Later, in the "upper room," Jesus explained this point in greater detail. He said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." (John 14:12) Here Jesus compared the permanent blessings which will reach the world through his death with those temporary blessings which then resulted from his miracles. He promised that his faithful followers, who suffer and die with him, will share in bringing forth that future fruitage of blessings to the world of mankind. Even the true disciples of Jesus at that time did not comprehend the fullness of meaning which was attached to these words of the Master. Not until they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost did they truly comprehend the privilege which was theirs of suffering and dying with Jesus, that they might live and reign with him, sharing in the dispensing of blessings of health and life to all the willing and obedient of mankind.

THE "BREAD" AND THE "CUP"

A few days after these circumstances, Jesus met with his disciples in the upper room to partake of the typical Jewish Passover supper. Jesus, knowing that he was about to be put to death as the anti-typical Passover Lamb, realized the solemnity of the occasion. He knew that very soon he would be planted in the ground as that "corn of wheat." He

was aware of the fact that within a few hours he would be “lifted up” on the cross to die for the sins of the whole world, and that this was the only way he could draw all men unto himself as the Redeemer and life-giver of the people.

Jesus knew that as the antitype of the Passover Lamb he was soon to be led to the slaughter, and that in the Father’s due time his blood would provide for mankind’s release from Adamic condemnation. He knew that those to first benefit from this release would be his footstep followers of the Gospel Age, and that later all mankind would be released from sin and death in the Messianic Age. In view of this, he deemed it important, and in harmony with the Father’s will, that he institute a memorial of his own death—a simple ceremony which would help to keep his followers reminded, not only of what he had done for them and for the world, but also of what they would have the privilege of doing together with him, as his partners in God’s plan of salvation.

As they were eating the Passover supper, Jesus took some of the bread, and some of the “fruit of the vine,” and used them to institute the Memorial Supper. We read that he “took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament [Covenant, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*], which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”—Matt. 26:26-29

This was not intended to be a new form of the Passover supper. It was designed to be a memorial of the death of the antitypical Passover Lamb. The

broken bread and the “fruit of the vine”—the product of the crushed grape—denoted suffering and death. The “cup” symbolized Jesus’ poured-out life. In John 6:48-51, Jesus previously had used “bread” to symbolize his flesh—his perfect humanity. By the two-fold symbolism employed in the Memorial Supper, we are reminded not only that a life was poured out for us and for the world, but that it was a perfect human life—a corresponding price for Father Adam.

How appropriate it is that once each year we should be so forcefully reminded of the basis of our reconciliation with God, and of our salvation from death. As we progress in the narrow way which leads to glory, honor, and immortality, we should become more and more aware of our own unworthiness of the grace which is daily bestowed upon us. Every failure in thought, word, and deed should keep us reminded of this. If we take these experiences properly to heart, we might well become discouraged, except as we remember God’s provision through Christ which makes acceptable our imperfect works. One of the reminders of this is the annual commemoration of the Memorial Supper. Surely, this simple service should be a great source of strength to every faithful follower of the Master.

AFTER-SUPPER LESSONS

In John’s Gospel, chapters 13-17, we have recounted for us some of the wonderful things which Jesus brought to the attention of his disciples following that last Passover supper in the upper room. These lessons are good for us today, and might well be

kept in mind in connection with our annual partaking of the Memorial Supper.

First, there was that meaningful lesson which Jesus taught by washing his disciples' feet. After performing this menial service, Jesus said to his disciples, "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 13:12-15) All true disciples of Christ should be glad for the opportunity of performing any menial service for their brethren which opportunity might provide. Failure to appreciate this privilege would mean that we have made little progress in the narrow way of sacrifice.

True humility in service has an application in every aspect of our relationship to God. Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5) Then Paul explains what he has in mind. He mentions the high position of Jesus before he came to earth to be man's Redeemer, and that he was willing to humble himself and give up his exalted position and to be "found in fashion as a man." Even after this, Jesus was willing to humble himself still further by being obedient to his Heavenly Father's will even unto death—even the ignominious death of the cross.—vss. 7,8

It was because of this spirit of humility before God, a humility that was reflected in his approach even to the little things of life, that Jesus was worthy of being exalted to the right hand of God and given a name "which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

of things in heaven, and things in earth; . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—vss. 9-11

A NEW COMMANDMENT

It was also in the upper room that night that Jesus gave his disciples that “new commandment, . . . That ye love one another; as I have loved you. . . . By this,” Jesus said, “shall all men know that ye are my disciples.” (John 13:34,35) The “all men” seems to especially refer to all who profess to be followers of the Master. Surely our love for one another should be a strong testimony to these that we are truly earnest in our endeavors to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus loved us to the extent that he laid down his life for us. Do we have this sort of love for our fellow-brethren in Christ? In this context, we might well think of our brethren as not only those who now know the Truth and are walking in the narrow way, but those also whom God may be drawing and calling to this honored position in his plan. These may also become our brethren, and it is our privilege to lay down our lives by taking the Truth to them in any and every way possible. In a word, we are laying down our lives for the brethren when we sacrifice all that we have in the service of the Lord, as directed by the Scriptures. Let us keep this in mind also, as we partake of the Memorial Supper on the evening of April 13th this year.

TAKE HEED

Jesus explained to his disciples that he was going away, and that they could not “follow” him then. (John 13:36) Peter did not understand this,

for he was confident that he was willing to go anywhere with Jesus, and said so: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." (John 13:37) Peter meant this with all his heart. Under the circumstances, he doubtless sensed that some great trouble lay just ahead for the Master. Peter was willing to be on the scene to make sure that Jesus came through safely, even if it should cost him his life.

Jesus' reply was, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." (vs. 38) What a heart-searching lesson this is for each one of us! It is a warning against being too sure of ourselves, and of our own standing before the Lord. It is this lesson that is brought to our attention in the statement, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."—I Cor. 10:12

We should have confidence and assurance, but in the Lord, not in ourselves. Of ourselves we would utterly fail. However, the Scriptures remind us: "He is faithful that promised." "What he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Heb. 10:23; Rom. 4:21) Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi that he was confident that God, who had begun the good work in them, was able to complete it. (Phil. 1:6) The same is true of all the Lord's people, and this—not our own abilities—should be the basis of our confidence as once more we partake of the "bread" and the "cup" of the Memorial Supper.

THE JOY SET BEFORE US

It was the joy set before Jesus that enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. (Heb.

12:2) In the upper room that night, Jesus set a glorious joy before his followers. After cautioning Peter against too much self-assurance, he explained that his going away was to prepare a place for his disciples, and that he would come again to receive them unto himself, that where he was, there they might be also. What a glorious prospect this must have been to them.—John 14:2,3

The disciples, however, did not at that time understand the full import of this promise. Even after Pentecost, John wrote, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) Today, we still do not have a full comprehension of Jesus’ promise. In general terms, we know that it implies “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) It means that we shall possess the divine nature, and share with Jesus the joy of being in the presence of our Heavenly Father. (II Pet. 1:4) These things we know, and in them we rejoice. Our rejoicing in this hope enables us to endure the cross as we continue to partake of the “bread” and the “cup.”

THE COMFORTER

In making known to his disciples that he was going away from them for a while, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be their “Comforter” and guide. (John 14:26;16:7,13) The meaning of this promise, like the other things which he had said, was obscure to the disciples that night in the upper room. However, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them on the Day of Pentecost, they then realized what a wonderful provision of divine

grace this Comforter was which he had promised them.

Today we are similarly blessed. By one Spirit we have all been baptized into the body of Christ. By the Holy Spirit we have become the children of God. We are anointed by that Spirit to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom and thereby to bind up the brokenhearted. We have the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God, and we have been “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”—I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:16; Isa. 61:1; Eph. 1:13

The Holy Spirit is the holy power of God, and we can rely on it to supply all our needs of strength, courage, and guidance as we continue to lay down our lives in sacrifice. Jesus said to Peter that Satan desired him, that he might sift him as wheat. (Luke 22:31) Satan desires all the faithful followers of the Master, and just as much so today as at the beginning of the Gospel Age. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail, and, as recorded in the 17th chapter of John, he has prayed for all of us. (Luke 22:32; John 17:9,20,21) Let us rejoice in the assurance that our Heavenly Father is still answering this prayer of his beloved Son, and caring for each one of us, supplying all our needs.

“NOT OF THE WORLD”

“If the world hate you,” Jesus said to his disciples that night before his crucifixion, “ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” (John 15:18,19) One of the practical lessons

in this is that our true friends are not those of the world, but the Lord's brethren, and ours.

The Memorial season is a good time to renew our love for the brethren, and to resolve that we will appreciate them even more. They are our people, because they are God's people. This does not mean just a few of them, or certain ones whose dispositions are compatible with ours according to the flesh. It means all the brethren. God has called them all out of the world, and to himself. Are we honoring his choice by extending our understanding, love, and service to all whom he has chosen? This is an important question to ponder in our hearts during the Memorial season.

Summing up his admonitions to the disciples the night before he was crucified, Jesus said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Today the hearts of the world are filled with apprehension and with fear, but in Jesus we can have peace—the peace of God which passes all human understanding.—Phil. 4:7

We also can overcome the world by rejoicing in the glorious fact that ultimately all mankind will have an opportunity to live because Jesus died for them. This also we can keep in mind as this year we again partake of the bread and the cup. In a few short weeks, on Memorial evening, we will behold in thought and memory, the Lamb of God—the Lamb that was slain. We will also remember that as a "corn of wheat" he fell into the ground, symbolically speaking, and died, and that therefore, much fruit results—both the firstfruits and the

afterfruits—the “church of the firstborn,” and all humanity.—Heb. 12:23; John 5:28,29, *Revised Version*

We will also keep in mind, as we partake of the Memorial emblems, that we have the privilege of suffering and dying with the Master. If faithful in this, we will share with him in bringing forth the fruits of sacrifice manifested in the blessing of all the families of the earth. May God grant that we shall be faithful! ■