

“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, most likely just before his death. He had reached the end of the narrow way of sacrificing and suffering, and was quite ready to be “offered up,” 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, and in the name of, his Lord. (Acts 9:16) He had admonished others to present their bodies a living sacrifice, and he had never held back from offering his own. (Rom. 12:1) He had fully developed in his being the “mind of Christ.” By looking at his experiences and the example of faithfulness he provided, we can be greatly assisted as we strive to develop that same mind.

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 the good fight, and he had kept the faith. An important part of that faith was his confidence in the promises of God—those promises which Paul refers to in our text as “a faithful saying”—which 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 brethren in the Lord endeavored to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit had testified that “bonds and afflictions” awaited him there.—Acts 20:22,23; 21:10-14

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. It was the Holy Spirit that had testified as to what could reasonably be expected. However, Paul did not agree with his advisers. Possibly he remembered the time when Jesus was likewise warned against going to Jerusalem where his enemies were plotting to arrest and kill him.

In Jesus' case, the Holy Spirit had also testified what to expect. The testimony was not as direct as

it was with Paul, but none the less definite. It had been given through the Prophet Daniel in connection with the "seventy weeks" which had been determined upon Israel, and that the Messiah would be cut off in the midst of the last of these "weeks," or seven-year periods.—Dan. 9:25-27

From this prophecy, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to give his life for the sin of the world caused by Adam's disobedience in Eden and, therefore, that it was the Lord's will for him to go to Jerusalem where his enemies could lay hold upon him and put him to death. When Peter said, "Be it far from thee, Lord," Jesus instantly recognized an effort on the part of Satan to thwart the divine purpose in his coming to earth. Jesus replied to his beloved disciple, "Get thee behind me, Satan: . . . thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."—Matt. 16:22,23

Peter was expressing the fallen human viewpoint of self-preservation, whose author is Satan, rather than the divine principle of sacrifice. This selfish perspective has motivated mankind almost entirely since the fall, and has led to untold suffering by millions. When Jesus seemingly addressed Peter as "Satan," it was merely from the standpoint that he was unknowingly expressing a desire which had its origins in the deceptive influences of the great Adversary.

Returning to Paul's experience, it is not clear from the record just why he was so convinced that it was the Lord's will for him to go to Jerusalem on this occasion. We may be sure, however, 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 here is that Paul did not decide against going to Jerusalem simply because 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, however, 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 of his 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, would have been killed by the Jews. He was arrested and became a prisoner. 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 21-28; 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 inspiring to read the account of Paul’s experiences of being brought before kings, traveling from place to place, witnessing to prison guards, being attacked by mobs, and faithfully preaching the Gospel wherever he went. This he did without regard to how much it must have seemed “out of season” for him to let his light shine. (II Tim. 4:2) How often when reading these thrilling accounts do we 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 hardship and privation. Indeed, God’s will for any one of us might well result, at times, in experiences which are pleasant to the flesh, even as his will at other times might also lead to great sacrifice and suffering. The deciding factor, however, should not be how the flesh 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 teachings of the 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. It translates the Greek word *logos*, which literally means “word.” Paul is not referring to any single statement or quotation, but to the general teaching of the Bible on this subject, a teaching which is clearly set forth in both the Old and New Testaments.

It is a “faithful” teaching, or as the Greek text puts it, “trustworthy.” We can have confidence in these promises of God, for he himself 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 despise the shame, which his course of faithfulness brought upon him. (Heb. 12:2) Having full assurance in 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.—II Cor. 4:17,18

FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The faithful saying, or teaching—that those who suffer and die with Jesus shall live and reign with him—began to be set forth by God in the Old Testament. This was done first by types and shadows contained in the Tabernacle and its services, and later through the testimony of the prophets. It has long been recognized that the sacrificial services of the Tabernacle in a general way pointed forward to the sacrificial phase of Jesus’ ministry.

However, certain of those typical sacrifices also foreshadowed the fact that the followers of Jesus would have the privilege of laying down their lives as joint-sacrificers with him. This was especially true of the Atonement Day (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) sacrifices which were offered yearly on the tenth day of Israel's seventh month. The animals offered for atonement on this Day of Atonement were a bullock and a goat—the bullock being offered first.

In keeping with God's instructions, the bullock was slain. (Lev. 16:11) Its fat was burned on the brazen altar in the Court. (vs. 25) Coals of fire from this altar, together with incense, were taken into the Holy, where the priest put the fire on the golden altar located there, and sprinkled the incense upon it. (vss. 12,13) The blood of the bullock was taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled "upon . . . and before" the mercy seat. (vs. 14) The carcass of the bullock was taken "without the camp" and burned, creating, presumably, a stench in the nostrils of the Israelites encamped around the Tabernacle. (vs. 27) Then the Lord's goat was sacrificed. In the same manner as the bullock, its blood was sprinkled "upon . . . and before" the mercy seat in the Most Holy.—vs. 15

This entire Atonement Day service might have remained merely an interesting story without special concern for us but for the fact that the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 13:10-13 refers to it, telling us that Jesus "suffered without the gate." This speaks to the fact that Jesus was not only crucified outside of the gate of Jerusalem, but suffered as an outcast from the social and religious systems of that day. Paul then invites us to go "unto" Jesus, "without the camp, bearing his reproach."

In Paul's reference to this typical lesson of the Tabernacle, he leaves no doubt as to the particular service he has in mind, for he mentions the fact of

the blood being taken into the Most Holy for sin. There was no other service in which this was done (Heb. 9:7), and in which the carcasses of the animals, whose blood was thus used, were burned outside the camp. Since there were only two animals thus sacrificed in the service, the conclusion is clear, based on Paul's testimony, that the typical bullock represents Jesus, and the Lord's goat represents the church, Christ's footstep followers.

What an accurate illustration this is of what was taught by Jesus and the apostles. The bullock and the goat both experienced the same treatment. On the occasion when two of the disciples requested to sit one on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left hand in the kingdom, he asked, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22) In other words, the Master pointed out to them that if they expected to live and to reign with him, they would have to suffer and die with him.

"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 this prophecy, the footstep followers of Jesus are referred to as "gods." Jesus himself quotes this text and applies it to those "unto whom the word of God came." (John 10: 35) In this reference, Jesus also reminds us that "the scripture cannot be broken." It is a faithful saying upon which we can depend. Indeed, the Word of God was provided especially for Christ's followers of

this Gospel Age. Knowing this, Jesus said, in a reference to his disciples, "I have given them thy word."—John 17:14

It is certain, then, that the "gods" referred to in Psalm 82:6-8 are the followers of Jesus, here spoken of prophetically. Concerning them, the Lord declared, "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 called the "children of the most High." However, the fact that they do "fall" like prince Jesus is one of the evidences that they are the sons of God. Perhaps Paul had this very passage in mind which, like the entire record of the Old Testament, was dictated by the Holy Spirit, 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

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 it is the reverse, as illustrated by the stench which arose from those typical carcasses burning outside the camp. These "gods" lay down their lives in the service of their Heavenly Father, letting their light shine. The darkness hates the light, however, and the sacrifices of the light-bearers are often considered unnecessary and fanatical.

This, however, 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) The Hebrew word here translated “precious” means “valuable.” In I Peter 1:19, we read about the “precious blood of Christ” by which we were redeemed. Here the Greek word translated “precious” also means “valuable.” It is not difficult to understand that Jesus’ work of sacrifice, as illustrated by his shed blood, was valuable, 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. 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,” and we know that this was as a sin offering. Earlier in this chapter, in verse 5, Paul explains that we are “planted together in the likeness” of Jesus’ death, and in these later verses he is merely providing the details as to what is involved in that “likeness.”

Certainly, however, we have no merit, or no life of our own which could be considered valuable 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

The full beauty and sequence of the faithful saying recorded in Psalm 82:6-8 is somewhat hidden

by an inconsistency in the translation of the Hebrew word *elohim* as “God” in the 8th verse. *Elohim* is the plural form of the word, and is properly translated “gods” in the Lord’s statement, “I have said, Ye are gods.” It is these “gods,” these mighty ones, these “children of the most High,” who “die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” It is clearly these same ones, having been faithful unto death, who, in the 8th verse, are bidden to “Arise, . . . judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.”

There seems to be no good reason for breaking up this logical sequence of thought by translating *elohim* in the singular, as it appears in verse 8 of the *King James* translation. In addition, who could be bidding God to “Arise,” and from what condition? The “gods” of verse 6 are shown as dying, as falling, being “planted together in the likeness” of Christ’s death. The faithful saying of the Scriptures is that those who thus suffer and die with Christ, shall live and reign with him. How appropriate that this thought is borne out, using the correct plural rendering of *elohim*, in the statement, “Arise, O gods, and judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.”—Ps. 82:6-8

Since it was Jesus who identified this prophecy as applying to his footstep followers, he may well be the “I” who, in verse 6, declares prophetically, “Ye are gods.” It could also be Jesus who is bidding his faithful body members to “Arise,” and “inherit all nations.” This would be in keeping with his statements in Revelation 2:10,26,27, and 3:21: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,” and “He that overcometh, . . . to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall

rule them with a rod of iron.” “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.” Indeed, these come forth in the “first resurrection” to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Rev. 20:4,6

GLORY TO FOLLOW

Peter reminds us that the faithful saying, or teaching of the Lord concerning the “better 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 we 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—those promises 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 saying” 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. It was perfectly clear to him, however, 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 deem himself to have fully attained that for which he had been “apprehended of Christ Jesus.” He had not yet reached the end of the way, and therefore did not consider that his trial period was over. Earlier, Paul had admonished the Galatian brethren not to become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) He had written to the Corinthian brethren that anyone too sure of his standing should “take heed lest he fall.” (I Cor. 10:12) Paul knew that he too was a man of “like passions” as the brethren to whom he wrote. (Acts 14:15) Since he did not believe that the time had yet come to take off the “harness,” he was not in a position to express himself too confidently.—I Kings 20:11

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

that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.—I Cor. 9:27

He had served long and faithfully, and at the cost of much weariness, hardship, persecution, and suffering. Now perhaps the most severe test of all was upon Paul. 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—fearing, perhaps, that identity with Paul would lead to their own imprisonment and death.—II Tim. 1:15

We do not know all the details of the trial through which the apostle was passing. It is evident, however, that at the time he wrote this epistle he had already learned definitely that he would be executed. He had said earlier in his Christian life that he was willing to die in Jerusalem for his Master, but he was not killed, for Roman soldiers were there and rescued him. Now it was different. The servants of Rome were prepared to take his life, rather than save it. The end was certain, but Paul had not wavered. I am “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.”—chap. 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 in his “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) He was ready to be given “the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Cor. 15:57) Therefore he wrote, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.” (II Tim. 4:8) Only by the strength of his Lord had he 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 Heavenly Father 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 intimately. “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.” “That day” would soon come when, by a Roman guard, his earthly life would be ended 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. 1:12; 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.” (chap. 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 close to strengthen and help him. Now that the Lord has returned in his Second Presence, we believe he has rewarded Paul with the “crown”—that “prize” for which he so untiringly ran, and for which he gave up everything else in life. (James 1:12; Phil. 3:14) Let us emulate the mind and character of Paul, as he had the “mind of Christ,” and be instructed and strengthened by the “faithful sayings” of the Word of God, written for our admonition. ■