

The World's Savior: Hated Without a Cause

“This cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.”

—*John 15:25*

THESE WORDS WERE SPO-ken by our Lord Jesus to his disciples during the closing days of his earthly ministry. He knew the distress and heartache they would soon suffer, and endeavored to prepare their hearts and minds for the tragic events that soon lay ahead. He did not want them to be stumbled, but to be ready to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and enter into the wonderful privileges of the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age.

THE WORLD'S SCORN

During Jesus' ministry, the disciples had been learning that being a follower of the humble and lowly Jesus did not bring upon them the goodwill of the religious world of their day. There were occasions when the multitudes flocked around their

beloved Lord, but often their motive turned out to be whatever material or fleshly benefit they hoped to receive from him. Few were interested to the point of faithfully following him, or being willing to make sacrifices in order to be his disciples.

When the time arrived for Jesus to be crucified, his disciples no doubt believed that he could somehow overcome this obstacle and assume his role as the leader and king of Israel. They were acquainted with the words of the Prophet Isaiah who had written concerning him, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." (Isa. 9:7) Yet, they did not know that it was first necessary for him to suffer and die for the world before the wonderful prophecies in connection with his kingdom glory could be fulfilled. It was their hope to share with the Master in his glory, which they believed was near at hand.

JESUS MUST DIE

Jesus did not withhold from his disciples the necessity of his soon coming death, and explained, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:51) His followers perhaps thought that what he had said must have some other meaning that they didn't know about. From the scriptural account, we learn, "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."—Matt. 16:21

Jesus informed his disciples concerning his approaching death, but they were not able at that time to accept the fact that it might actually happen. He knew they were still viewing their privileges of discipleship from the standpoint of material advantages and of the glory they hoped to attain from being associated with him. He knew that, after Pentecost, they would be imbued with the Holy Spirit of understanding.

Luke recorded the event: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”—Acts 2:1-4, *New American Standard Bible*

JESUS' FOLLOWERS HATED

The disciples loved their Master and were convinced that he was the divinely appointed leader, but they did not yet comprehend the fact that there was to be suffering and death associated with his ministry, as well as glory and honor. Peter later wrote, “Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

In our featured scripture, Jesus acknowledged that he was hated without a cause, and he also explained, “If the world hate you, 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. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."—John 15:18-21

The Master also forewarned, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have 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 16:32,33

It is well to note that it was not so much the warning of coming persecution that was designed to give the disciples peace and good cheer, but rather when it did come they would understand its true meaning. They would then realize that they were having the great privilege of suffering with him. He wanted them to know that he overcame the world, and that they too would be given strength to overcome the world if they continued to be his disciples. With this promised assurance of victory they could rejoice, despite the opposition and persecution of the world. Knowledge that they were suffering with their dear Lord would give them courage to continue faithfully on.

OVERCOMERS

In the example set by Jesus during his own life, ministry, and teachings, it is clear that the Christian

life is one of struggle against opposition. A continual warfare is waged in which we are engaged in deadly combat with formidable enemies that would overpower us, unless we were given divine strength to overcome them. Satan, the Devil, is the church's great Adversary, and his allies are the world and our own fallen flesh. Speaking of himself, the Apostle Paul wrote, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."—I Cor. 9:27

The term 'to overcome' is used to describe the Christian's victory over the Devil, over the Devil's world and our own flesh. Evil is the very foundation of the world of which Satan is the prince. Paul thus admonished, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12:21) John also encourages, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4

John is the only apostle who writes specifically about overcoming the world. When considering this matter, it is well to remember that there are two great principles operating in the earth. These are love and selfishness, or good and evil. The Apostle John had a clear vision of divine love, and this helped him to discern the importance of overcoming the world. It meant being victorious over evil and the selfish spirit of the world.

GOD IS LOVE

Our Heavenly Father is the author and principle of love, and has been its sponsor throughout the ages. Satan, however, is the sponsor of selfishness.

These two principles have been at war with each other ever since the fall of man. The people of God—those whom he has called to serve him and who have been faithful to the terms of their calling—have been motivated by love during this Gospel Age. They have been begotten by the Holy Spirit of God, while the majority of mankind pass through life controlled largely by the principle of selfishness. Man was created in the image of God and traces of this image still remain and manifest themselves in deeds of kindness on the part of many.

However, it is not the occasional kind deed that constitutes overcoming the world and its spirit. It must be a conversion from the principle of living for oneself to that of living for God, and by devoting our lives to his service. Self-preservation is part of the law of nature, and may be true with respect to the lower orders of creation. It is only because of sin that it has been adopted by the human family as a dominating motive of life. It has become so much a way of life in the world that it is considered normal. Self-interest is the principle which rules this present evil world, over which Satan is the prince. “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:4

There are some who have made noble attempts to fight against this spirit instead of drifting along with the tide of selfishness that sweeps the masses along to inevitable destruction. They have striven against it, and have given their lives in causes which they intended might eventually turn the tide, or at least alleviate the sufferings of those

who were unable to help themselves. These will have their reward in God's due time.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

The only way in which selfishness can be done away with, and the principle of love established throughout the earth as the motive of life, is through the divine plan of salvation. In Jesus, we have our most comprehensive example of love as a way of life. He not only gave us an example, but enjoined love upon his followers, saying, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you."—John 13:34

This spirit of love was not fully understood nor appreciated by the rich young ruler who was told to sell all he that he had and give to the poor, and he went away sorrowful. (Matt. 19:20-22) In following the law of self-preservation, he had accumulated worldly goods as a protection against a rainy day, and he wasn't prepared to abandon the idea. Even the disciples were perplexed at this advice to the rich young man which seemed to reflect a reckless abandoning of all self-interest.

Commenting on the incident, Jesus explained to his disciples that it would be "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (vss. 23,24) "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."—vss. 25,26

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

"Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall

we have therefore?” (vs. 27) Peter was reminding the Master that as his disciples they had complied with the conditions that he sought to impose upon the rich young ruler. Their all was not as much as his all, but the principle was the same. Having made this sacrifice they naturally wanted to know what they could expect to get. Peter’s question reveals that as yet he had not appreciated the real spirit of discipleship. He perhaps hoped that he would receive something in the way of honor and prestige. Instead of being a humble fisherman, he may have wished for a prominent position in Messiah’s kingdom, and to be a ruler, or a great one among men.

“Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.”—vss. 28-30

GOD’S WILL

When Jesus announced to his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem, and that he expected to be arrested there and put to death, Peter would not hear of it. “Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” (Matt. 16:22) Jesus’ reply to this well-meant advice was, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be

of men.” (vs. 23) Peter was attempting to persuade the Master that he should permit self-interest to influence him, and not go to Jerusalem where he knew his enemies had set a trap for his arrest.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

In doing this, Peter was promoting the cause of Satan who always encourages men to consider themselves first. Men of the world, over which Satan is the prince, naturally think of self first. It is openly their way of life, and has been since the days of Eden, but it is not God’s way. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—vss. 24-26

It is doubtful if the disciples understood the depth of the Master’s remark at that time, but it was the method he used to explain the difference between the way of selfishness and the way of love. Love is manifested by a self-sacrificing interest on behalf of others.

Jesus was even then losing his life sacrificially for the whole world of mankind. Men of the world considered it foolish that he should think of anyone but himself. Jesus, however, was appealing to Peter’s mind and heart by directing his attention to the fact that his life would be saved. It would be saved in God’s way, and not by following the worldly principle of self first.

To overcome the world means that in living up to the terms of our consecration we stand against

the principle of selfishness with which we are surrounded on every hand. We lay down our lives unselfishly in the service of God, of the Truth, and of the brethren. We are called out of the world, so we are to remain separate from it, and not permit ourselves to be influenced by its selfish spirit. We cannot reform the world, nor change any of its institutions, from the love of self to that of the sacrifice and denying of self. The test upon us is to continue separate from the world while endeavoring to lose our lives in the cause of divine love.

This is Satan's world and we cannot take part in any of its arrangements, nor should we be influenced at any time by its viewpoint. The world has its pleasures that are often selfishly inspired, and should be shunned by those who are endeavoring to overcome the worldly spirit. As followers of the Master we are being prepared to share with him in the rulership of God's new world, and are being trained in the principles of love. In so doing, we are losing our lives in sacrifice.

THE UPPER ROOM

As we approach another Memorial season many of the Lord's people will joyfully accept the occasion to partake of the emblems which he commanded we observe. It was in the upper room where he inaugurated the Memorial Supper. This year the consecrated people of God will partake of the emblems after sundown Sunday evening, March 28, 2010.

"As they were eating, Jesus 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, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."—Matt. 26:26-29

INVITATION TO THE DISCIPLES

Jesus invited his disciples to partake of these emblems, thus signifying that they not only were to benefit from that which they represented, but also that they would share in the deeper significance and meaning of the memorial of his death. This was later emphasized by the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the brethren at Corinth. He explained to them the common union of the body and blood of Christ as pictured by the bread and the wine. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."—I Cor. 10:16,17

BAPTISM UNTO DEATH

A rich blessing awaits the Lord's people each year as they commemorate the memorial of the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. Partaking of the bread and cup represents our participation in his sacrifice. Let us rejoice in the divine grace toward us, and remember that they picture our privilege of dying with Jesus, denying ourselves, and laying down our lives in doing God's will. It is a baptism unto Jesus' death.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into

death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3-5

It is a special invitation to share in our Lord’s death, and to ‘follow him’ means that our experiences in the world will be similar to his. Jesus explained, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.” (John 13:16) “These things I have 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) “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. 3:21

HATED WITHOUT A CAUSE

The world of Jesus’ day hated him, and finally put him to death. They hated him because his way of life was contrary to theirs. By his example of sacrifice, he condemned their way of selfishness and, by his teachings, he exposed their popular errors while teaching unpopular truths. ‘This cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.’ ■