

Like One of the Princes

“But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.”
—*Psalm 82:7*

ONE OF THE CHARGES

levelled against Jesus by his enemies was that he claimed to be the Son of God. This, they said, was blasphemy, and blasphemers should be put to death. On one occasion when being charged with this alleged offense against the Law, the Master cited the verse just preceding our opening text which declares, “Ye are gods,” and said that it had reference to those among mankind to whom the Word of God came.—Ps. 82:6; John 10:34-36

Prior to Christ’s coming, God’s people were merely servants; so this is evidently a prophecy relating to the Christian age when, according to John 1:11,12, Jesus introduced his followers into sonship with his Father. Throughout the New Testament, therefore, we find this blessed teaching concerning our being sons of God clearly set forth.—Heb. 3:6; I John 3:1,2

“Ye are gods,” the prophecy states—that is, “mighty ones.” This is indeed the reward to which

Christians are called. Jesus, after having proven his faithfulness unto death and willingly given his perfect human life as the ransom price for all mankind, was resurrected by the Father and given “all power” in heaven and in earth. By the Father’s authority, he has promised to bestow upon those found to be faithful overcomers and having kept his works unto the end, the power to then become “mighty ones” who will share his kingdom rulership with him. (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 2:26,27; 3:21) However, promises of such high exaltation in God’s plan are not unconditional. Those who become mighty ones with Jesus must first prove their worthiness for that position. “Ye shall die like men,” the prophecy states, “and fall like one of the princes.”

Here is set forth the Christian’s privilege of dying with Jesus, and the manner in which he is to die is stipulated—to “fall like one of the princes.” None of the princes among the angelic hosts of creation has ever been given the privilege of dying in God’s cause, so the princes here mentioned must be found among God’s human creatures. A prince is a ruler, and when Adam was created he was given dominion over the earth. The right to rule would have been shared by his posterity had sin and death not blighted the human race. The only other perfect human being to whom this right has ever belonged was Jesus. Here, then, are the two “princes” alluded to in the prophecy.

The prerequisite for becoming “gods” and exercising power over the nations on a partnership basis with Christ is that we die, or “fall” like one of these princes. Both of these princes fell in death,

but the manner of their falling was certainly not the same. The human race is so accustomed to death that most people consider it a necessary experience, failing to realize that it is a present necessity only because of Adamic sin. Prince Adam did not have to die. When placed in the Garden of Eden, he was on trial for life or death. Continued obedience would have resulted in everlasting life, and the retaining of his title as Prince over the earth forever.

However, Adam did not obey divine law. He yielded to the adverse influences which were brought to bear upon him, and went down in shame, dying as a sinner. Adam's posterity automatically shared in his condemnation because they have all been conceived and born in sin. (Ps. 51:5) None are able to keep God's perfect law. Hence, they all "fall" in death like Prince Adam, that is, as sinners under condemnation.

SACRIFICIAL DEATH

Prince Jesus, however, did not fall in death because he had sinned against God's law. There was no necessity on his own account that he die. As he explained, no one could take his life from him unless he permitted it. He had the right to lay it down voluntarily if he wished, and he had the right not to do so. (John 10:17,18) Jesus died as a voluntary and willing sacrifice. "My flesh ... I will give for the life of the world," he stated. (John 6:51) How vastly different, then, was the falling in death of Prince Jesus from that of Prince Adam! We can be "gods," mighty ones in the kingdom of Christ, only if we fall in death as he fell—that is, if we

voluntarily die with him, being “planted together in the likeness of his death.”—Rom. 6:5

The fact that members of a fallen and dying race can die other than as sinners who are condemned to death is made possible through the justifying value of the blood of Christ. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” wrote the Apostle Paul. (Rom. 5:1) Accepting by faith the provisions of God’s grace through Christ, we are no longer alienated from him because of sin, but have “peace with God.” We are reckoned by God as free from Adamic sin and its penalty, and are afforded “justification of life.”—vs. 18

This justification of life through the blood of Christ, however, is for one purpose only, which is that we present ourselves in sacrifice, following the example of Jesus. (Rom. 12:1) Consecrating our lives thus to the service of God, we are authorized to count ourselves as being sacrificed in the likeness of Jesus’ death, thus falling “like one of the princes.” (Ps. 82:7) By means of this arrangement the followers of the Master have an opportunity of proving their loyalty to God and to righteousness. Upon the basis of enduring the tests faithfully even unto death, they are considered worthy of living and reigning with Christ as “gods,” or mighty ones, in God’s kingdom.

CONSIDER JESUS

To know that it is possible for us to “fall like one of the princes” is important only if this knowledge inspires us to faithfully walk in the footsteps of the Master. The theory is beautiful, but to us as individuals that beauty fades if we fail to translate theory

into practice. If we are sincere in our professions, therefore, we will delight to consider Jesus—to study his life, his service, and his sacrifice—in order that we may be copies of him.

Every word and act of Jesus is worthy of emulation, but we will confine our present consideration more particularly to the manner in which he gave up his life and all the rights pertaining to it, which properly were his. In this respect his example becomes the most illuminating during those closing days of his ministry, when he knew that his hour of death was near, and he was faced with the reality of giving up his earthly existence forever. It is this particular phase of Jesus' sacrificial life that faithful Christians will be considering at this season of the year, as, in harmony with his request, they once more commemorate his death by partaking of the Memorial emblems.—I Cor. 11:23-25

It is well to first remember that Jesus voluntarily went to Jerusalem, contrary to the advice of Peter, when he knew that his enemies there were plotting to kill him. (Matt. 16:21,22) Previously he had avoided this danger, not that he was unwilling to die, but because his Father's due time had not yet come for him to complete his sacrifice as the world's Redeemer. Obedience to God was the first rule by which Jesus governed his life. If obedience meant life, he rejoiced; if it meant death, he continued to rejoice with an inward joy of knowing that he always did those things which pleased his Father.—John 7:6,8; 8:29

In Jerusalem we find Jesus with his disciples in that "upper room" where they prepared to celebrate the Passover. (Luke 22:7-13) The fact that it was the time for the Passover was significant to Jesus,

for by this he knew the exact day on which it was his Father's will for him to die. It was also the "midst of the week," the prophetic seventieth week during which the Messiah was to be "cut off, but not for himself"—that is, he did not die as the sinner Adam died.—Dan. 9:24-27

Jesus perceived the thoughts of his disciples. He knew of the plans Judas had made to betray him, but even then he addressed Judas as "friend" [Greek: comrade]. (John 6:64,70,71; Matt. 26:50) What a valuable lesson this is for us as we consider Jesus with the thought of dying as he died. Jesus had entered into a covenant with his Father which called for the sacrifice of his human life. He knew that he could not be faithful to that covenant short of actual death, so what did it matter just how his sacrifice was to be consummated, even to the point of betrayal?

We too have laid our lives on the altar of sacrifice. We have covenanted to die as Jesus died. Should we become embittered toward those who in any way may be instrumental in lighting the fires which consume the sacrifice, or who help to keep them burning? Judas was a traitor, to be sure, and Jesus might have delivered a long and bitter harangue against him, and justly so, but he did not. Judas had been richly blessed and honored by the Master. Jesus had a right to expect better things of him, but love "seeketh not her own." (I Cor. 13:5) Love was impelling the Master to give up his rights, to give up everything, even life itself. Are we like him?

SERVANT OF ALL

While in the upper room, Jesus gave his disciples another wonderful object lesson by washing their

feet. A controversy arose among them as to who would be the greatest. Indeed, they were destined in God's plan to be "gods"—mighty ones. However, it was quite out of place for them to be aspiring for power and authority over one another. Thus Jesus, who was their Lord and Master, washed their feet as an example of humble service, explaining that the best token of real greatness is willingness to serve even in the humblest, menial ways.—John 13:1-17

Here again we have a point for consideration which helps to reveal the manner in which Jesus died. Many in the world seem willing to die for a cause, if accompanying their martyrdom there is a blare of trumpets and popular fanfare. Are we willing, though, to lay down our lives in all the little and humble ways which opportunity presents to us? Are we willing and glad to do this even though unnoticed and unknown by others? To do so is to use our strength as Jesus did, to die as he died, to be like him and qualified to be mighty ones with him in the kingdom.

THE MEMORIAL SUPPER

With the Passover supper concluded, Jesus took some of the leftover unleavened bread and wine, the "fruit of the vine," and instituted a new ceremony. This was neither a new way to celebrate the Passover, nor a fulfillment of the Passover type, but it was a memorial of the fulfillment. That fulfillment was the death of Jesus. He died as the true Passover Lamb who "taketh away the sin of the world." "This do," the Master enjoined, "in remembrance of me."—John 1:29; Luke 22:17-20

The world is in the habit of commemorating the birth of its noble ones, but Jesus knew that the important aspect of his ministry was his death. Without his death all mankind would continue forever under the condemnation of death on account of sin. When he invited his disciples to partake of these emblems, Jesus explained that his fleshly body, soon to die, and his blood, soon to be shed, was being given for them. The broken bread and the cup of wine were both symbolic tokens of Jesus' sacrificed life—for his disciples and for all mankind.

Thus each year, on the anniversary of the Master's death, consecrated believers come together as little groups throughout the world to partake of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, in memory of the death of Jesus. He was as a Prince among humanity, not condemned to death. Yet he sacrificed his life, humbly and gladly giving it up that others might live. He fell, not a victim of sin, but a victor over it, and over the condemnation of death which results from it.

TO GETHSEMANE AND THE CROSS

Following the service in the upper room with all its precious lessons, they sang a hymn and went out. (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26) Prospectively, as the prophet had foretold, they were all "gods." One of them was a Prince, to whom rightfully belonged the dominion of earth. However, he was going out to Gethsemane and to the cross to die, to fall as a victim for the sins of others, but triumphant over selfishness because he was doing it voluntarily.

As they walked toward Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples that they would all be offended because of him. However, not understanding what was involved,

they all disclaimed any intention of wavering in loyalty to their Master. Peter was especially outspoken in expressing his determination to stand by Jesus, and to die for him if need be. We know he meant it, for not long after that he went into action with a sword against a whole mob in order to rescue his Lord from their clutches.—Matt. 26:31-35,47,51; John 18:10

On into the garden they went. It was far into the night, and the disciples were weary. Even Peter, James, and John, whose love for Jesus seemed often to glow with a little more warmth than did that of the others, found it difficult to “watch” with their Lord. Then, alone with his Heavenly Father, this Prince prepared to gain the final victory. “Not my will, but thine, be done,” he prayed, and then he was ready. He was glad to die for the sins of the whole world, to fall in death as a Prince in order that atonement for the failure of Prince Adam might be made.—Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:42

As we watch the swift-moving scenes which culminated on the cross, we discover that every word and every act of the Master emphasizes that his life was not being taken from him against his will. He was, in fact, presenting his body voluntarily as a sacrifice so the necessary blood of atonement might be made available to make propitiation, first for the church’s sin, and later for the sins of the whole world.—John 10:17,18; I John 2:2

“Put up thy sword,” he said to Peter, who was trying to defend him. (John 18:11) Knowing that the religious leaders of Israel were seeking his death on the charge that he blasphemed by claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus did not offer any explanation when the high priest asked him if this was what he

really did claim. “Thou hast said,” was his reply. (Matt. 26:63,64) When to this was added the charge of treason against Caesar, Jesus again acknowledged that what he was accused of was essentially correct. “Art thou a king?” asked Pilate, and the Master replied, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world.” (John 18:37) There was no defense, no dodging the issue, no holding back. This was Jesus, our perfect example.

“THEY WATCHED HIM THERE”

With very little ceremony Jesus was delivered to his accusers. He was flogged and crowned with thorns in derision. He was spat upon. They blindfolded his face and then smote him with their hands. Mocking, they said, “Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?” (John 19:1-3; Matt. 26:67,68; Mark 14:65) He was hung upon the cross and on the inscription above his head, written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, he was designated the “King of the Jews.” He was their King, but they killed him because of their unbelief. The account further states, “And sitting down they watched him there.” (Matt. 27:35-37; Luke 23:38; John 19:19-22) What a sight, and what a lesson for us as we too watch him with the desire to learn what he did, that we may likewise be “faithful unto death!”—Rev. 2:10

As they “watched him there,” the jeering, angry mob shouted, “Save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Not for an instant did Jesus display the faintest desire to prove to them that they were wrong, that he was indeed the Son of God. He just let them continue to mock and curse him.—Matt. 27:40-44 *(Continued on page 36)*