

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

THE RELIGIOUS 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.

The words of our opening text, taken from Psalm 69:4, were spoken by Jesus to his disciples during the closing hours of his earthly ministry. He knew the distress and heartache they would soon suffer, and endeavored to prepare their hearts and minds for the 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 partake of the wonderful privileges of the heavenly calling.—Heb. 3:1

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.—John 6:26, 27,60,66

When the time arrived for Jesus to be crucified, his disciples no doubt believed that he could somehow escape death 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 the Messiah, “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. 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) Although Jesus’ statement was clear, his followers must have thought that what he had said had some other meaning.

Jesus knew that his disciples 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 also that, after Pentecost, they would be imbued with the Holy Spirit of understanding. Now, though, they were unable to accept the fact that their Lord's death would actually happen.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS HATED

The disciples loved their Master and were convinced that he was the divinely appointed Messiah, but they did not yet comprehend there was to be suffering and death associated with his ministry, prior to 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 the coming scattering and 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 Jesus. 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 combat with formidable enemies that would overpower us, unless we were given divine strength to overcome them. Satan, the devil, is the Christian's great Adversary, and his allies are the world and our own fallen flesh. (I Pet. 5:8; John 17:14,15; Rom. 7:18) Speaking of himself, the Apostle Paul wrote, “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself

should be disqualified.”—I Cor. 9:27, *English Standard Version*

The term “overcome” is used to describe the Christian’s victory over the devil, over the world, and over 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 begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory [Greek: means of success] that hath overcome the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4, *Revised Version*

GOD IS LOVE

Our Heavenly Father is the author of love and has been its sponsor throughout the ages. Satan, however, is the author of selfishness. These two principles have been at war with each other ever since the fall of man. The people of God—those who have served him faithfully in every age—have been motivated by their love for him. They have been guided by him and his Spirit, while the majority of the rest of mankind have passed 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. (Gen. 1:27) However, it is not the occasional kind act 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 devoting our lives to his service. Because of sin, “self” 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 that rules this present world, and Satan is the “god of this world.”—II Cor. 4:4

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 guiding principle of life, is through God’s 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 neither fully understood nor appreciated by the rich young ruler who was told to sell all he that he had and give to the poor, but then went away sorrowful. (Matt. 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23) In following the law of self-preservation, he had accumulated worldly goods for himself, and he was not prepared to share them with others. The disciples were perplexed at Jesus’ advice to the rich young man, which seemed to reflect a reckless abandoning of all self-interest.

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

Peter then said to Jesus: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27) 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 in return. 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 desired a prominent position in Messiah's kingdom, to be a ruler, or a great one among men.

Jesus answered: "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." (Matt. 19:28,29) We should not have the mistaken idea from this passage that the Lord wishes Christians to sacrifice others. It would be wrong to deprive our families of necessary comforts and provisions. However, after having done this, the surplus is the Lord's.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

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." 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." (Matt. 16:22,23) 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 awaited.

Peter was unwittingly promoting the cause of Satan, who always encourages people to consider themselves first. Those of the world, over which Satan is the prince, most often think first of self. 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."—vss. 24,25

Jesus was even then losing his life sacrificially for the whole world of mankind. Generally speaking, in society today most consider it foolish to think of anyone else but themselves. Jesus, however, was appealing to the mind and heart of Peter and the other disciples by directing their attention to the fact that their lives would be saved in God's way, not by following the worldly principle of "self first."

To overcome the world means that, as Christians, we stand against the principle of selfishness with which we are surrounded on every hand. We lay down our lives unselfishly in service to God, to the Truth, and to the brethren. (Phil. 3:7,8; I John 3:16) We are not called to be "out of the world," or to live in isolation from the world. (John 17:15) Rather, though we are in the world, we are to remain separate from its principles and standards, and not permit ourselves to be influenced by its selfish spirit. The test upon us is that while we physically live and work in the world, not to be conformed to its general spirit, but continue

endeavoring to lose our lives in the cause of divine love.—Rom. 12:2

BAPTISM UNTO DEATH

A rich blessing awaits Christians each year as they commemorate the memorial of the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. Partaking of the symbolic bread and cup represents our appropriating the benefits of his sacrifice. (Matt. 26:26-29) Having thus received the benefits of his ransom sacrifice, we rejoice in the divine grace toward us and remember our privilege also of sacrifice, to “die daily,” as it were, denying ourselves, and laying down our lives in doing God’s will. (I Cor. 15:13) This might include ostracism by the world, expenditure of physical strength, or being injured by those who have slandered us by their words.

Ours is a baptism into 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

We have received a special invitation to follow in the footsteps of our dear Lord and Master. 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) To those who faithfully follow in the Master’s footsteps, even if they

be “hated without a cause,” the promise is given: “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 ■