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The King's Template

(Convention Address)

A NEW AGE There can be no doubt that the first advent of our Lord Jesus, the Christ or Anointed of God, commenced a new era in God's dealings with mankind. Throughout His ministry, He revealed God's loving nature and taught a special kind of Kingdom based on God's love and goodness.

Can there be any doubt that, when all have eyes to see and ears to hear, almost everyone will rejoice in God's provision and hasten at the opportunity to be in that Kingdom. This is to be a Kingdom in which Jesus Christ Himself will be King and all of mankind could be His subjects.

For the Kingdom to be open to all mankind, it was necessary for those already dead, and those yet to die, to be resurrected from the dead state of nothingness. Although the extent of this resurrection was quite different from the understanding of God's teachings held by the establishment, Christ did preach that "*The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.*" (John 5:28,29).

But He did much more than tell us about the Kingdom and the resurrection. By paying the penalty of Adam's sin, the sin which passed sinfulness to every one of Adam's descendants, our King made possible that resurrection of all people.

HOW TO START

To begin a new age, it was first necessary to define in what way it differed from the previous age. Very early in His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ summarised those differences in the platform known as the Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters five, six and seven of Matthew's Gospel.

It also established the principles or rules which are to prevail throughout the Realm. Even more, the Sermon on the Mount is the basis for developing the character of all His subjects —the Church now — later all who in full light and knowledge will choose to live.

Accordingly, it is suggested that the Sermon on the Mount can well be regarded as the King's Template.

THE TEMPLATE

A template is something that delineates a pattern to be copied. It may be a few marks on a piece of paper when a door lock is purchased. It may be a stencil. It may be a detailed outline to help in making something quite complex. A common form of template is a sheet of any material from which shapes or letters have been cut out to permit designs or characters to be copied many times.

To see the Sermon on the Mount as the King's Template is to apply that group of messages as the pattern or design He is using in this Gospel Age to form His Church.

Christ's Template particularly specified the attitudes which are to prevail in the hearts of His subjects. It is a model to be used in conforming each subject to the image of God's Son. The Template is not easy to follow but development to so high a standard requires a precise pattern.

Whilst the Kingdom described is yet future, there was then and is now a sense in which the Kingdom is already present. This must be where Christ rules in the heart of a believer. Surely a Kingdom exists wherever the King reigns supreme. Acceptance of the King's requirements and the endeavour to follow them indicate a desire to be part of Christ's Kingdom. Where Jesus Christ is King in this heart or that heart, there exists Christ's Kingdom.

COMFORT

The Sermon began with the wonderful words of comfort known as the Beatitudes. To study them is to rejoice in them. We cannot be surprised that wisdom from above led our King to begin His promulgation with words of encouragement and comfort.

Before laying down rules that are difficult, He gave those He called then and us now something to hold on to. Being aware of our frailties, He knew of our need; the Beatitudes give the very comfort and assurance required. *(These are a rich study in themselves).*

ANGER AND CONTEMPT

Our Lord gives blunt warnings against anger and contempt. Anger is an emotion which takes control away from our reasoning capacity. Obviously a proper society requires its rational beings to be in control of their emotions.

Contempt for others is a different problem. It forgets that the others were created by God and to some extent belittles the work of His hands. Admittedly, the features leading to any contempt would have been a spoiling by man of God's handiwork but the fact of creation requires respect for the being itself.

INTENT

The Sermon on the Mount or King's Template places importance on the intent behind the action. It is not sufficient to avoid doing wrong, we are also to control our desires so that we do not want to do wrong. This is not easy but it does have an inbuilt blessing. When we do not desire wrong, it is easier not to do wrong.

God seeing the intent of our hearts has another blessing for us. When we fail to achieve some good or when our efforts to help someone end up hurting them, the fact that God knows the intent of our heart is re-assuring.

OFFENDING EYE

Respect for others and indeed for self demands a minimum standard of conduct. When we fall short of this, we should be aware of it, endeavour to correct the fault and confessing it to God seek His help to overcome.

The suggestion of plucking out the offending eye is not intended to be taken literally. The body designed and created by God is to be respected. Our Lord's words here are a way of placing relative importance on the offence.

TRUTH

An essential ingredient for the Kingdom to be an harmonious society is truth and honesty. Where truth prevails in all things, there is no need for oaths to identify which things are true. In other words, the use of oaths to confirm the truth of some things clearly implies that things not sworn to may be suspect.

In the Kingdom there will be no need for oaths. This should be so now for all followers of our King. Some think the law of the land requires oaths but, in this land anyway, our law accepts a simple affirmation. It appears that civil authorities have more regard for the instructions in Matthew 5:34-39 and James 5:12 than the regard held by ecclesiastical authorities.

Avoiding oaths is easy and despite the teachings of some religions, our Template says they should be avoided even now. Not so easy is the other side of the requirement. Footstep followers are to be truthful in all things. How we need help from above!

RESIST NOT EVIL

This is one of the hardest rules to understand. That is not to say it should be cast aside. Perhaps the circumstances at the time indicated some particular types of evil faced by the believer which should not be resisted. It was a country occupied by a foreign power.

Our Lord was not a revolutionary. He put more weight on preparation for the future of Righteousness. Remember His discourse with Pilate.

Another explanation is in the Twelfth of Romans *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good"* (V.19-21)

LOVE IS PARAMOUNT

The Template certainly sets out some difficult instructions. Perhaps we could look now at probably the most difficult. *"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."* (Matt 5:44).

All would quickly appreciate the clear implication that this calls for love of all mankind, even our enemies. There is no exclusion of worshippers of any form of golden calf, let alone those who believe different doc-

trines.

It is hard enough to love the unlovely, but to love one's enemies seems almost impossible. Just as well nothing is impossible to God. We must NOT try to water down the requirement. The verb rendered love is 'agapao', as intense as any love and well distinguished from instinctive or family love. It is a voluntary love which means that it is in our control whether or not we have this love. If that were not so, it could not be commanded. There is no way out. To obey Christ's instruction we have to make ourselves love our enemies.

Indeed, when we compare and contrast this instruction with our Lord's indication of the two great commandments of the Old Testament, it is clear that the command to love our enemies is the one fundamental in the Template. This must be so because it embraces and prevails over all other features demanded by our King's Template.

Our Lord knew it was hard. He said "*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*" (Matt 5:48) At the time He, too, was a man in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. In chapter seven He again acknowledged the difficulty in the words "*Enter ye in at the strait (or difficult) gate.*"

FATHER IN HEAVEN

Five times in the sermon our Lord used that term '*Your Father which is in Heaven.*' This poses the question as to whether the term should be understood as a reference to God's universal Fatherhood of all mankind or His particular Fatherhood of those begotten again from above by His Holy Spirit.

Like many others this question requires us to study God's word for ourselves and come to the conclusion to which we feel God's word is leading us. For the present question, we should look to the introduction and to the postscript of the Sermon mindful that the message is also for the profit of people of today.

PRAYER

Two of the most helpful passages in the King's template are His instructions on Prayer. Both seem to emphasise the personal nature of prayer. This can be contrasted with ceremonial prayer. Whilst it is only fitting that all things should be done decently and in order, there is a danger that ceremony may replace sincere prayer with the vain repetitions our Lord warns against.

It is interesting that neither of the passages on prayer in chapter six mention our Lord Himself as a means of access to God. We certainly have it elsewhere in His teachings. No doubt His intent here was to further emphasise the relationship of a child to a Father who loves the child. Love and reverence are to take away any terror fear.

The petition 'Thy will be done' can be seen to include a request for help in complying with the Template. Seeking His will to be done in all things implies that it should be done in the one praying. The same expression can also be seen as an acknowledgment of God's power over all things indicating that everything that has come to pass must have been in accord either with God's deliberate will or at least His permissive will.

MODEL PRAYER

It is suggested that the passage known generally as the Lord's prayer was not intended to be recited by rote except for the purpose of learning the principles involved. Indeed it is full of instruction on principles. One can see individual petitions representative of prayer elements such as —

Address	Our Father Which art in Heaven
Praise	Hallowed by Thy Name
Faith	Thy Kingdom come
Trust	Thy will be done
Intercession	On earth as it is in heaven
God's Grace	Give us
Daily Provision	Our daily bread
Forgiveness	Forgive us our debts Acknowledgment As we forgive our debtors
Dependence	Deliver us.

PROVIDENCE

How beautifully our King pointed out to us God's provision for our every real need. The birds and the flowers are reminders of the beauty of the righteousness which will glorify all aspects of society in the Kingdom. Physical needs are of little significance compared with attitudes of love and selflessness. However, we are assured that the unimportant temporal needs will be added when we seek God and His righteousness.

It should be recognised that the word 'first' in chapter 6:33 means 'firstly in importance'. There is nothing wrong with giving time priority to this seeking but the real emphasis in the Temple is the weight or zeal to be given to this search. Looking for the Kingdom and God's righteousness is to be the most important thing, first in our desires and highest on our list of treasures.

THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW

When proper regard is given to the Kingdom, here and in the future, the worries of the world around us are relatively unimportant. Certainly we are to value life. It is God's first gift to each one. This also calls for prudent conduct of our own affairs and dealings with others.

However, the assurance of God's providence must take away all fear. It is worrying thought or anxious thought that must be dispelled. How impressive is the language of the King James version "*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the thins of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" (Mat 6:34) This last phrase must mean "Wait until the future problem is here before you worry about it and then you may see it is not a worry at all."

JUDGING

The mote and the beam are a strong picture against judging others. Whenever we look at the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain we are reminded how difficult it is to control our own thoughts and actions. To judge another would be to pretend that we have full control of everything we do and to think that we have sufficient wisdom left to control others.

GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

We are told to "*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*" (Mat 7:7) In Luke 11:13 these words are specifically associated with the Heavenly Father giving the Holy Spirit. "*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*"

We tend to think of the gift of the Holy Spirit particularly as the begetting again from above to newness of life, God's response to the sincere consecration of a believer called to the High Calling. However we should not think of God as restricted to a single function of His Holy Spirit. In Old Testament times God frequently blessed by His Holy Spirit in various ways. There is no reason to think He should not be able to do so now, or in the resurrection, as it pleases Him.

THE GOLDEN RULE

The principle most quoted from the King's Temple is the Golden Rule. "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*" (Matt 7:12). It is usually converted to modern language, the shortest form being "Do as you would be done by."

How different the true Golden Rule is from those of this evil world like "Do as you are done by." or "He who has the gold makes the rule."

We have already considered the breadth of the command to love set out in the King's Temple. It is now suggested that the Golden Rule lays down the depth of His command to love. But this aspect of the Temple is not new. It is really saying the same thing as the Law of 1918, Leviticus 19:18 that is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." He who loves his neighbour as he loves himself would surely do to the neighbour that which is best for the neighbour.

The Golden Rule does not call for unwise indulgence. We ought not to want unwise indulgence upon ourselves. The inspired words of Paul help in this regard. "*Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.*" (Rom 15:2) Of course, edification is not mere lifting up but actually building up of character.

IN CONCLUSION

The Sermon on the Mount did not have the television coverage of the recent Olympic Games, but it did rock the then know world. Moreover, it has had a greater influence on the history of mankind than any other oration. However, the effects to date are really nothing when compared with the future changes which will bring all mankind into conformity with the King's Temple.

This Sermon on the Mount is probably the best description we have of the social structure of resurrected mankind in the Ages after the millennium reserved for correcting all the troubles of our present world. When every subject in Christ's Kingdom has come to fit the design in that Temple, they will be living in a beautiful world. They will then give all the praise to God for that wonderful achievement just as we now praise Him for the prospect of it.

While restricted by the earthly vessels of this life, we will often fall short of the standard in the King's Tem-

plate. Fear of failure is no argument to lay it aside. If we regard Him as our King, we will do our best to do just as He wants us to do. To this end, we must not forget the power available to us. (FMG:199 2)

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of sound mind.” (2 Tim.1!7)

Blessed Bible

What divine fulness pervades the Word of God; with several precious truths often latent in one short passage, awaiting those who will “search the scriptures.” John 5:39. (W P W McVey)

Standing At The Portal

(A new year exhortation)

At the close of another year, it is surely good for each of us to look back over the past twelve months and recall both the blessings and trials of the way, to meditate upon the lessons our Heavenly Father has sought to teach us, above all to realise just how He has faithfully watched over and cared for us. Perhaps at the time and in the midst of the experience, we were too close to events, too emotionally involved, to fully see His hand and to recognise how He was monitoring our way, and we need to pause to reflect and then to thank and praise Him for His unfailing love and mercy to us in Christ Jesus.

But what of the year before us? Around us, the world is in turmoil and while most in this country still have food and shelter, there are financial crises, employment problems, increases in crime, violence and anti-social behaviour. As foretold in God’s word, seemingly all those things which can be shaken are indeed being already shaken, so that only the unshakeable will remain. Praise God, our trust is in Him who is unchangeable, whose mercies fail not but are new every morning.

The following new year exhortation was written and published one hundred years ago —its message remains just as relevant today:

“Our day is peculiar in many respects. Not only is it a day of blessings, advantages and conveniences beyond any other, but it is a day of dissatisfaction and discontent beyond any other. Not only is it a day of greater light and understanding respecting the Lord’s plan, but it is a day in which the great enemy of the truth is permitted to spread before the awakening nominal and real church more sophisticated delusions in the name of “new light” than ever before. Not only is it true that a man or woman has five times the opportunity for usefulness in God’s service, ever before enjoyed, but it is also true that business, worldly pleasure and ambition are five times as active and powerful to keep us back from this possible usefulness. It behoves us, therefore, not only to awaken to our present privileges, blessings and opportunities, but to keep awake to them. He who does not realize that this will require a constant battle with selfishness, within and without—with the world, the flesh and the devil—is very liable to fall into the snare in learning of it.

Nevertheless it is possible, even now, for the intelligent Christian to have absolute contentment, to escape the errors of our day and to keep himself actively in the love and service of God. This blessing, with the peace that passeth all understanding, is, however, only for the few: for those whose faith is resting in the perfect work of Christ—in the ransom which He gave—and who are fully consecrated, heart and body, to the Master’s will and work and way in every matter. Such He does not leave in darkness and doubt in this day when the hearts of the worldly-wise are “failing them for fear and for looking after those things coming upon the earth,” but to them are fulfilled the promises—“He will show you things to come”; “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”—free from the bondage of error, free from the bondage of fear, and from those other bondages of creeds of men and of social and religious societies into which fear is driving many under the plea of “union”..

But while we do well to remember gratefully the mercies of the past year and to rejoice in the grace sufficient with which it was so richly supplied, it is wise for us to look carefully to our steps for the year beginning. While we did not fall last year, some did. Our trials and testings may be more severe during the year beginning, and unless we feel our own insufficiency and look to our Master continually, we shall be liable to depart from humility, to become puffed up with pride and haughtiness, the sure precursors of a fall. And again, if we look merely to our own weaknesses we will become so discouraged as to yield readily to the adversary’s assaults. Our only safe position will be to feel humble and to realise our insufficiency, to trust implicitly and always in Him who has promised that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. (If there be any breach between us, if any leaving and forsaking, it will be on our part, not His.)

We can safely trust our all to Him who assures us that “all things shall work together for good to them that *love* God (with all their hearts)—to those called according to His purpose.” We need have no fear of the ultimate results, so long as we find *our wills* fully submitted to our Master’s will, and our hands and thoughts filled with His work. We may have full confidence, and may rest in peace upon the promise, “He will not suf-

fer you to be tempted *above that ye are able*, but will with the temptation provided also a way of escape.”

“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. Whom resist (by standing) steadfast in *the faith*, knowing that similar afflictions are being accomplished in your brethren in the world.”-1 Pet. 5:8,9.

The more we realize that we are in the harvest—the winnowing and testing time—the more we should each seek to follow the Apostle’s advice, “Make straight paths for your feet lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.” Each of us has learned some of his weak or vulnerable points of character, and each should seek, not only to strengthen these weak points but also specially to fortify himself against temptations and besetments of the adversary upon those weakest points, lest he thereby be turned out of the straight and narrow way.

This means a circumspection of our affairs in general. Home affairs, business affairs, all should be ordered and systematised with a view to protecting our own weak points to the Lord’s praise and to the good of ourselves and others. Let us see that our hearts are fully given up to the King, and then with the wisdom which He will supply to those who seek it, divide our time and talents among our various duties so as to spend and be spent more to the honour of the Lord and to the service of His truth, and we will find ourselves liberally repaid in spiritual favours.”

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your deeds be done in love.” 1 Cor.16:13,14.

The King In His Beauty

(Isaiah 33:17)

“Thine eyes shall THE king!” The very same

Whose love shone forth upon the curseful tree,

Who bore thy guilt, who calleth thee by name;

THINE eyes shall see.

“Thine eyes shall see the KING!” The Mighty One,

The Many—crowned, the Light-enrobed; and He

Shall bid thee share the kingdom He hath won;

Thine EYES shall see.

And “in His BEAUTY!” Stay thee, mortal song,

The “altogether lovely” One must be

Unspeakable in glory — yet ere long

Thine eyes SHALL see.

Yea, though the land be “very far” away,

A step, a moment, ends the toil for thee;

Then changing grief for gladness, night for day,

Thine eyes shall SEE!

(Author unknown)

Stephen — Preacher and Martyr

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” — Rev. 2:10

It is not surprising that, with all the fire of zeal and love, active amongst the early Christians, the Adversary likewise was on the alert and active in stirring up persecution against the primitive Church. The first Church at Jerusalem had prospered greatly. Not only was the Lord’s blessing upon the Apostles in their ministries, but

upon others of the Church also, who, full of love and zeal for the Truth, told the good tidings as they had opportunity. They had the Gospel message in its purity, and it was a pleasure to tell it.

The message itself incited love and devotion, and kindled a flame of sacred love in their hearts which tended to make each believer a burning and a shining light, as the Lord Himself had enjoined.

There had arisen in the early Church the need for a class of servants who were designated as deacons, and Stephen, a young man of prominence and zealous for the truth, had been chosen for this office. However, we hear very little of him as a deacon, for he evidently excelled others and went past his office as deacon and attained fame as a preacher. In personal character he is described as being full of grace and power. (See Acts 6:8-15).

Stephen's Preaching

His zeal for the Master's cause and the spread of the Gospel message led him into public discussions, and his opponents, finding their arguments inferior to his, were angered instead of convinced. This shows their insincerity. Had they hungered and thirsted for the Truth, they would have been glad to receive it from Stephen, or from anybody. Let us beware of such a spirit in ourselves, knowing that it is dangerous. In this case it led on to murder; not merely the murder accomplished when Stephen died, but they were murderers in advance, from the Lord's standpoint, because hatred of him was in their hearts. "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." They had, however, respect to the outward forms of the Law, and sought a pretext to justify them in killing their opponent.

Had they no fear of God! Apparently it is possible for men to get into such a condition of heart that they will not only speak evil of us and plot mischief against us, but to the extent that they can do so will be glad to put us to death. This is a part of the murderous spirit, whether they stop short of the actual death or not. It went to the limit with Stephen and with our Lord, and it may do so with us some day.

Stephen's opponents were crafty. They hired witnesses to describe the teachings of Stephen in an unjust manner, saying he talked dishonorably of the law and of Moses. Blasphemy in that day was the worst of crimes. As a result the people, the Elders, the scribes, came upon him, seized him and brought him to the Council, or place of trial. Then the prejudices of the people were again appealed to through witnesses who perverted the truth, saying that Stephen was continually saying things against the holy city and temple and the Law and claiming that Jesus would destroy the place and change the customs. There was, perhaps, considerable truth in this statement, rightly understood.

Stephen was the first to grasp and proclaim the truth that the old forms of worship must disappear before the new, a transition that has been difficult for the Church to negotiate to this day. This process cost the early Church a long battle, in which Paul was the magnificent champion of the new liberty, but it was Stephen's inspired genius that first saw the truth and his bravery started the battle. He began to shake the Church loose from the narrowness and bondage of Moses (necessary and good in its day) and to let it out into the glorious breadth and liberty of Christ.

So today in traducing the Lord's true servants, some may tell partial truths, which really are falsehoods. It is a weakness of human nature to suppose that such misrepresentations are excusable. They should remember how impossible it is to deceive the Holy Spirit, as Ananias and Sapphira learned. The lesson to the Lord's faithful is that it is far better to be the sufferer under such circumstances than to be the one who causes the suffering and who must eventually answer for his crime.

"As the Face of an Angel"

There is an inspiration of the heart and an illumination of the features which accompanies the presentation of the Truth by those who are indwelt by the Lord's Holy Spirit and who are speaking as His ambassadors. Many have observed the bright and shining countenance of some who since Stephen's day have been zealous and faithful in proclaiming the truth. Doubtless this is akin to what is mentioned in our lesson respecting Stephen's face — that it was bright, happy, radiant "as the face of an angel." An angel is a messenger, and if Stephen, by the grace of

God, was permitted to be the Divine messenger or mouth-piece and permitted to convey the "good tidings" to others, surely, then, we also are angels in the highest sense conceivable. No wonder there is no need since Pentecost that the angels should appear in human form! The children of God, indwelt by His spirit, can be God's mouthpieces in the very highest sense.

Stephen's sermon is not directly a part of the lesson, but indirectly it should be borne in mind. It was a comprehensive view of Divine favour in Israel, bringing the matter down to date and showing Jesus, the son of Abraham according to the flesh, rejected and crucified by those who should have received Him. This was the galling feature of the Gospel among the Jews — their responsibility as murderers of their Messiah. We read that His hearers "gnashed on him with their teeth."

“Cut to the Heart”

This action signified chagrin, disappointment, savage animosity. We read that they were “cut to the heart.” Stephen’s words were sharp and their force consisted not in any angry or bitter denunciation, but in plain, simple narration of the Truth. This should be the style of all preaching. It is not necessary for us to say angry or bitter things. The Truth itself is “sharper than any two-edged sword,” and needs no unkind language, no profanity, no epithets to drive it home. Where immoderate and unchristian language is considered necessary it is a sure sign that the argument is correspondingly weak, and it warns us to beware. The Truth itself is mighty, even if spoken by a little child. Another has remarked:

“By his whole handling of the history Stephen made it plain that he was not hostile to Moses and was a loyal Jew. But he also showed that God had not tied Himself down to any ‘place’ or ‘custom’ in administering His grace, but had revealed Himself in many places and through many Prophets.

Interwoven with this truth, it was also shown that these Prophets had been rejected in the same narrow and ungrateful spirit that was then intensifying itself into final hardness of heart. At this point, Stephen seems to have seen his judges stiffening themselves against the Truth in unbelief and rage, and he cut his address short with a terrible arraignment of their guilt in betraying and murdering the Righteous One.

All this is not ancient history, but may verily be re-enacted in our day and in our hearts.” Hearing Stephen with impatience, aggravated by the fact that his argument was true, they were gnashing their teeth with chagrin, because they were unable to detect a flaw or an excuse for his death.

Finally, however, when he declared that he saw a vision of Christ at the right hand of God, his statement of the matter furnished the excuse they had been waiting for, and, seizing it, they rushed upon him, crying out in a loud voice and stopping their ears, as though to convince one another that to willingly hear anything more on that line would be a participation in the blasphemy. They rushed him out of the city gate and stoned him. A young man, Saul, supposedly an officer of the Council, being present, gave his sanction by taking charge of the outer-garments of those who stoned him to death.

Such a martyrdom is not the style in our day; hence none of us will probably suffer death in that form. We have more refined forms of persecution. Christian people may get themselves into such a wrong attitude of heart as to think that they do God service in hurling slanders at those who have sought to do them good. And indeed who does not know that the blow of slander may be even more cruel and even more painful and more shameful than the literal stoning? We ask ourselves what was the matter with those Jews who thus maltreated both our Lord and Stephen, and the answer comes back, “Ye have not the love of God in your hearts.” Similarly we must answer in respect to those who in our day persecute through slander, vituperation, evil-speaking, evil surmisings, evil-insinuations, etc.

“Father, Forgive Them”

Stephen’s attitude of heart towards his enemies indicates that he had not only received the Holy Spirit, but that he had it as a living power, and that its fruitage was in his heart. He had only love for his enemies. Having done his very best to serve them with the Truth, he had prayers for them in return for their imprecations and their cruel stones. He prayed, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” So far as he himself was concerned, he had no desire that they should be punished. This beautiful condition of heart should be ours. “Owe no man anything but to love one another” — and to desire one another’s welfare is the application of the Divine rule to all the affairs of our lives.

We read that Saul (afterwards Paul) was amongst those who consented to this martyrdom. How strange the anomaly — that so many should think to be right and to be the Divine service, that which we know to be very reprehensible in the sight of God! Seeing such great blindness on the part of one who subsequently declared, “I verily thought I did God service,” should surely cause us to be very circumspect, very critical, in respect to our thoughts and deeds. We must remember that it is not a question of whose servants we claim to be, but, as our Lord said, “His servants ye are unto whom ye render service.”

“He Fell Asleep”

No suggestion was given that the first Christian martyr passed immediately to heaven, and that with his expiring breath he became more alive than he ever was. On the contrary, here as elsewhere in the Scriptures, death is pictured as a sleep.

“Asleep in Jesus, blessed sleep, From which none ever wakes to weep.”

How glad we are that this is so! The Awakening time will be after the close of the reign of sin and death; after our Redeemer’s Second Advent, when the power Divine will be in control, instead of that of the prince of this world. Truly, “Weeping may endure for the night,” but it ceases with our sleeping, and “joy cometh in the morning” of the resurrection. — Psa. 30:5

“Scattered Abroad”

The Death of Stephen marked the beginning of an epoch of persecution, especially in Jerusalem, where for some years peace had prevailed and the message of the Gospel found considerable root in the hearts of “Israelites indeed.” The Lord allowed these new beginners to attain a fair degree of development in grace and knowledge, and then permitted the persecution which scattered them everywhere throughout Judea and Samaria. The effect was that, so far from the Truth being injured, it was carried to larger numbers, for every true disciple is a light-bearer. Saul was one of the chief persecutors, apparently. We read that he made havoc of the Church, entering every house, and, armed with the necessary legal authority, he effected the imprisonment of many, and thus led to the scattering of others. But in some unaccountable manner this persecution seems to have passed by the Apostles. The Lord probably wished to keep Jerusalem as the centre for the Apostolic ambassadors of the Truth for a season.

The lesson for us all is faith, courage, zeal, a loyal heart, a shining face, love and prayers for our enemies, and to see that we learn a lesson from the evil course of others — “See that no man render evil in return for evil,” as the Apostle says.

The fact that the Jews had not power to put our Lord to death, but did have the power to stone Stephen, is explained by the fact that stoning to death for blasphemy was the divinely instituted punishment, according to the Law. But the Jews, being subject to the Romans, were not permitted by them to exercise the death penalty. Following the death of our Lord, Pilate was ordered to Rome to stand trial on certain charges brought against him, and thus the Roman power in Palestine was somewhat abated, and the Jews, in the absence of a dominating force, exercised their own laws. *“They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” — Acts 6:5.*