

The King in His Beauty

*“Thine eyes shall
see the king in his
beauty: they shall
behold the land
that is very
far off.”
—Isaiah 33:17*

THROUGHOUT THE OLD

Testament we find many prophecies and promises concerning the coming of a great one whom the Creator would send to be the Redeemer, Savior, and king of all people. One of these prophecies contains words very familiar to millions among mankind: “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” (Isa. 9:6,7) Herein is the portrait of a ruler such as the fallen human race had never seen, and whose rulership has never been experienced—that of the Messiah, Christ Jesus.

The end of the year 2018, more than two millennia since the birth of Jesus, finds the world reeling in an increasingly hopeless state of chaos and confusion. The only thing which it seems can now save the world and the human race itself is some sort of

superhuman power, an unselfish being who would be wise enough to map out a new and better course for the people, order his plans put into effect, and have power to enforce his edicts. If the world could be convinced that a ruler such as this is on hand to assume authority, he would probably be universally acclaimed.

However, this is a great deal to expect, for such a king would, of necessity, have to break with human history and tradition along all lines. He would have to be a leader capable of establishing his authority without the necessity of leading millions of the world's youth into battle to be killed. Indeed, he would be little different from all the imperfect rulers of the past and present if he attempted to enforce his decrees under threat of destruction and warfare. He would also have to be a king who would take as much interest in the poor as in the rich, and who would respect the rights of all races, ages and nationalities equally.

A king qualified to lead the world out of its present chaos could not be an advocate of one group over another. He would have to be a promoter of the interests of all—the entire human race. Because all people are members of this one all-inclusive group, he would need to be just as interested in the bad as in the good, in the uneducated as in the scholars, and, perhaps most importantly, in the dead as well as in the living.

Moreover, such a ruler would have to be very wise, acting as a counselor as well as a judge. He would have to possess the qualities which one of God's prophets ascribes to the foretold great Messiah of promise. Of this one we read, "The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of

knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And he shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:2-5

This is one of the prophetic descriptions of Jesus, whose birth is once more being commemorated by millions. No king, no ruler, and no government possessing less wisdom and justice and power than indicated in the above words of the prophet could hope to successfully assume the rulership of the world today and bring peace and satisfaction to all the people.

Jesus is said to be capable of fulfilling still another prophetic picture, given to us by the psalmist. “Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king’s son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. ... In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”—Ps. 72:1-8

NOT APPRECIATED

Jesus’ disciples believed that he was the one foretold in this and many other prophecies of the

Old Testament. Yet, Jesus did not have an army. He never tried to exalt himself at the expense of others. Rather, he was noted for his kindness. He loved all and was sympathetic even toward the erring. Those who observed him noted the “gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth,” and that he “went about doing good.”—Luke 4:22; Acts 10:38

The world was too evil to appreciate so noble a character. Jesus was hated by the rulers of his day, and the charges brought against him were aimed at his very life. His own people said that he claimed to be a king, and they brought him before a Roman governor for trial. He was asked by Pilate, “Art thou a king?” To this Jesus replied, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world.” (John 18:37) In stating this, Jesus knew that in effect he was sentencing himself to death, because such a claim would be considered treason against the Roman Empire.

This kind, sympathetic, understanding and self-sacrificing servant of the people whose birth the world again commemorates, was a Jew. When Pilate realized he could do nothing more to save his life, he permitted his soldiers to place a crown of thorns upon his head. Showing Jesus to the people, Pilate exclaimed, “Behold your King!” In reply, though, the Jewish religious leaders shouted, “Away with him, crucify him. ... We have no king but Caesar.”—John 19:14,15

The angels who announced the birth of Jesus declared that he would be a Savior, one who would save the people from their sins. (Matt. 1:20,21; Luke 2:10,11) To do this it was necessary that he give his life in sacrifice. Jesus knew this, so he did not resist when brought before Pilate to be sentenced to the cruel death of the cross. His disciples were perplexed.

They believed that Jesus was born to be a great world-wide ruler, but now he was dead. The angelic announcement of his birth, his many miracles, and the gracious words which he had spoken, now seemed meaningless.

HOPES REVIVED

The disciples' hopes were soon revived. Jesus was raised from the dead, and the resurrected one explained to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die before entering into his glory. (Luke 24:25-27) Jesus' true disciples at that time soon learned that all the promises of kingdom glory and blessings which they believed Jesus had come to fulfill were to be realized, but not immediately.

Jesus appeared to his disciples several times after his resurrection. At his last appearance they were bold enough to ask him, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" To this Jesus gave a veiled reply, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—Acts 1:6-8

The account continues: "When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."—vss. 9-11

WORK TO BE DONE

Much truth is revealed in this incident. The disciples learned they were not then to be given a great deal of information concerning the time elements of God's great plan of salvation as centered in Christ. Instead of being concerned about time, they were to go forth, after the Holy Spirit came upon them, to be witnesses for Jesus. This witness work was to be worldwide, to "the uttermost part of the earth."

Jesus had left them. They saw him taken up into heaven. Two angels had appeared and assured them that he would come again at some future time. Putting these thoughts together, they began to realize that the work of proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom worldwide was to be their part in God's plan during the time Jesus was away. Since it was to be a worldwide proclamation of the Gospel, they understood that this would take time to accomplish, which would mean that his coming was not to be soon, according to human thinking.

Ten days later, when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples, they embarked on the mission which Jesus had assigned to them. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, they learned that just as it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and die in order that the world might be blessed through his kingdom, they and all dedicated believers of the present age have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. Indeed, they realized that unless they followed faithfully in his footsteps of sacrifice, even unto death, they could not hope to be associated with him as rulers in his future kingdom.

IMPATIENCE

As time went on, however, a spirit of impatience manifested itself among some of Jesus' followers. They wondered why his kingdom was so long delayed. Some seemingly concluded that although he had not returned to them as promised, his kingdom must in some way already be functioning, and thus they were sharing in it with him at that very time. The Apostle Paul addresses those who had this erroneous view, saying: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you."—I Cor. 4:8

If the time had come for the followers of Jesus to reign with him, Paul knew that he, too, would be reigning, rather than suffering ridicule, persecution, and injury in the Master's service. Paul, however, knew the truth concerning God's purposes. He knew that the present age is a time of sacrifice and suffering on the part of Jesus' followers. He knew that the kingdom period of glory was still future. However, the spirit of impatience, and perhaps also of ambition, continued to creep in among the professed followers of Christ. After the apostles fell asleep in death, a great "falling away" from the "faith once delivered unto the saints" soon came about. (II Thess. 2:3; Jude 1:3) Notably, this spirit of impatience and ambition gave rise to the development of a great church system which then united with civil powers and claimed to be reigning as the kingdom of Christ.

By this time, the real significance of the birth of Jesus had been lost to the vast majority of his professed followers. While with their lips they continued

to praise him as the promised “Prince of Peace” who would bring “good will toward men,” they helped to plunge Europe into one of the bloodiest periods of war in history. For centuries, armies of professed Christian nations and factions were pitted one against the other in deadly combat, mercilessly killing one another, all in the name of Christ.

Not even the angels who announced the birth of Jesus knew all that would be involved before his kingdom of peace would become manifest throughout the world. (I Pet. 1:12) More than two thousand years have passed since Jesus was born, and still the angry divisions of earth’s inhabitants continue to war against one another. Each passing year seems to indicate diminishing faith in God’s plan to establish a worldwide government through the one whose birth is still commemorated by millions.

WE NEED PATIENCE

Even among Christians who have been enlightened in these “last days” by the Word of truth, there is much need for patience in waiting for the fruition of the divine plan. Concerning the fact that we are in the “harvest,” which is the “end of the age,” there should be no doubt. (Matt. 13:39, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) This calls for faithfulness in continuing to make known the Gospel of the kingdom—that the kingdom of Messiah is close at hand. This glorious theme song of the Bible continues to be proclaimed throughout the earth, thus indicating that the harvest and its glorious work are not finished. This means that not yet are the righteous shining forth “as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:43

We can appreciate more fully today than in the past the feelings of the disciples when they asked Jesus, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) We, also, would like to know when our glorious hope will be consummated in kingdom glory, and when the long-promised blessing of all the families of the earth will commence. The question, "How long, O Lord?" has no doubt been asked by God's faithful people throughout the age. (Rev. 6:10) It is now still close to our hearts, even though we know that the kingdom is "nigh, even at the doors."—Mark 13:29

How timely is the admonition, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. 10:35-37) Let us indeed maintain our confidence, knowing that to do so we need patience. We need "patient continuance in well doing" as we seek for "glory and honour and immortality." (Rom. 2:7) We need patience as we watch for the fulfillment of all God's gracious promises toward us of joint-heirship with Christ Jesus in his kingdom.—Rom. 8:17

A "LITTLE WHILE"

In the foregoing passage, Hebrews 10:35-37, Paul associates his admonition to patience with the return of Christ, saying, "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." It is interesting to note that the entire age, from Paul's time to the return of the Lord at the time of the harvest, is spoken of as "a little while." So it has been, as God

views time. Now that we are in the harvest with which the age ends, how much more evident it is that only “a little while” remains between our harvest labors of today and the kingdom glories of tomorrow!

We do not know how much longer the harvest will continue. The Heavenly Father does, however, and if we are to be with Jesus in the kingdom it is essential that we be faithful to our commission now to proclaim the Gospel message of hope, health and life for all mankind at every opportunity. Kingdom honors and authority will be bestowed only upon those who are thus faithful, even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

What should the birth of the Prince of Peace mean to us today? Its commemoration should be a signal to redouble our efforts in doing the Father’s will. It should mean an increased rejoicing in our hope—a rejoicing that will enable us to remain firm unto the end of the way of sacrifice and service. It should remind us afresh of how much mankind truly needs the kingdom, and of the blessed privilege we have of telling the whole world the blessed tidings that Christ’s righteous government is so near at hand!

The coming of Jesus was God’s great gift to man. (John 3:16) Our appreciation of that gift can be manifested by the giving of our all in the great Messianic cause which Jesus came to implement. The angels proclaimed the good tidings that Jesus, earth’s future king, was born. Now we, as messengers at the present time, have the privilege of continuing that proclamation. We not only announce his birth, but as the words of our opening text state, we joyfully make known “the king in his beauty.” Let us be faithful to our covenant with the Lord as we patiently and actively wait for the glorious consummation of our hope. ■