

Shining Forth as Lights

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”

—*Matthew 5:14*

IN THIS SERIES OF STUDIES

concerning the search for God's people, we have considered many of the experiences associated with the spread of the Gospel message. Beginning with Jesus' earthly ministry, continuing with the work of the apostles and the formation of the Early Church, we have examined the Scriptural events which framed this important period in God's plan. We have seen that the search for those who would appreciate and love the “good news” centered in Christ began in a very small way, in the regions of Judaea and Galilee.

This search soon spread to Samaria and other adjoining regions. It went south to parts of Africa, north into Asia and Asia Minor, and finally west to Europe. It was the tireless efforts and great sacrifice of many dedicated servants of God which contributed to its success, as shown by the large number of individual ecclesias which were established as a result of their endeavors. Without the work and ministry

of these faithful men and women, the search for God's people would likely have come to a halt soon after it started.

We are thankful, however, that this has not been the case. As noted in the opening lesson of this series, the search for those who will be of the Christ class has progressed from the time of our Lord's First Advent until our day. We also note again that the object of this search has not changed from what it was in the days of the apostles. The completion of this special work of selecting and preparing the footstep followers of the Master will be followed by God's promised kingdom. Then, God will "search out" the remainder of mankind, including all those in the grave, whom he will raise, and give the opportunity to also be his people. Of that time, John the Revelator wrote: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."—Rev. 21:3

One of the important privileges of all those down through the ages whom God has used to search out others to constitute his people, is that of shining forth as lights in the world. It is the light of God's truth, which reveals his radiant character, that those who have come to know him desire to reflect to others. That light has been especially manifest in the fact that God, in his abundant love, sent his "only begotten Son" to be man's Redeemer. (John 3:16) In this last segment of this series, we will look at the manner in which all those striving to serve the Lord can faithfully shine as lights, for the purpose of searching out those who will be God's people, whether now or in his coming kingdom.

WITNESSES OF JESUS

During the Gospel Age the light of God's glory has been manifested in quite a different manner than in past periods. When in our text Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world," he was speaking to his disciples. The era during which God miraculously manifested his hand in the protection and blessing of his chosen people, Israel, and in the punishment of their enemies, was rapidly drawing to a close. In a few short years God's typical people were to hear those fateful words, "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38) Subsequently, the light of God was to shine out through other channels, and by different means.

In this new arrangement, Jesus was the Leader, the Captain, the Forerunner. He declared of himself, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) Jesus knew that he would not personally remain in the world, and that the work of God entrusted to him would be continued by his representatives—his "ambassadors." (II Cor. 5:20) In Revelation 20:4, they are referred to as those who are "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God."

This language describes martyrdom, or the giving up of life in the service of Jesus and the word of God. During the Gospel Age, faithfulness leads to death, and we are encouraged by the promise, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

In the beginning of the age, and continuing through the lifetime of the apostles, miracles were employed which demonstrated the glory of God. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. The apostles did the same, but they themselves died, and

the onlooker was given no evidence of divine overruling or care in their lives in this regard. Although Jesus was raised from the dead, few aside from the disciples believed it. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost, but their enemies refused to accept what they saw and heard as evidence of God's hand in their affairs. Instead, they alleged that the disciples were intoxicated.

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death, all miraculous demonstrations of divine protection and love ceased, and the Lord's people throughout the age since have been called upon to walk entirely by faith. They have been witnesses of Jesus, not because divine favor has been miraculously manifested toward them, but because they have been faithful in proclaiming the "gospel of Christ," which, as Paul asserts, is "the power of God unto salvation."—Rom. 1:16

The commission given to these by Jesus was that they should be his witnesses in all the world by preaching the Gospel. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8) In ages past, when the Lord's people were called his witnesses, it was because God revealed his glory by the miraculous manner in which he dealt with them. In the Gospel Age, those who witness for Jesus have done so by proclaiming the marvelous plan for human salvation which Jesus was sent into the world to execute. In proclaiming this gospel, they tell not only of the mighty miracle of Jesus' resurrection, but also of the miracle of the resurrection of those who will live and reign with him.

Furthermore, the full gospel message calls for a declaration of that great future miracle which will be necessary for the awakening of all the dead, and

the restoration of the willing and obedient to full perfection of life as human beings on the earth. In proclaiming the facts concerning these miracles, the witnesses of Jesus are strengthened by their knowledge of what occurred in the past. They know that the God who delivered Israel from Egypt, who escorted them safely through the Red Sea and across the Jordan River to victory in Canaan, who sent an angel and destroyed an Assyrian army in one night, and who delivered the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace, is abundantly able to fulfill all his good promises pertaining to the deliverance of all mankind from sin and death.

Only a handful of these witnesses for Jesus ever actually saw him, but they believe the testimony of those who affirm the fact that he lived, and died, and was raised from the dead. They also believe and proclaim the testimony of Paul that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was highly exalted above angels, principalities, and powers, and above every name that is named, to the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Eph. 1:18-23) They also accept and preach the further testimony of Paul which declares that ultimately "every knee should bow, . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:9-11

These witnesses of Jesus are glad to occupy this place, as his ambassadors, in the arrangements of God, because they delight to obey the divine command to honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Indeed, they realize that they cannot honor the Father at all, except as they do so through the Son. (John 5:23) They know that to honor and worship the resurrected and glorified Jesus, and to

serve as his witnesses, does not detract from the glory of God, for they understand that it was the Father's power that exalted his Son to this high position at his own right hand.

As "witnesses of Jesus, and for the word of God," these go forth with a song of praise upon their lips—praise to God for his love in sending Jesus to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. They praise God's divine wisdom which designed such a loving plan of salvation, and his justice which, while it could not clear the guilty, made provision to wash away their sins by the blood of the Redeemer. They praise the power of God by which every feature of his glorious purpose is implemented and made sure.

These do not go about shouting emotionally, Praise the Lord! However, they do praise and honor God by making known his loving plan as it is centered in Christ Jesus. They rejoice that the Holy Spirit of God has authorized them to be witnesses of Jesus. They rejoice that they are authorized to explain the plan of God as it relates to those who are invited to be joint-heirs with Jesus in the spiritual phase of his kingdom, as well as to proclaim the glorious hope of "restitution" for all mankind during the thousand years of Christ's reign.—Acts 3:20,21; Rev. 20:4,6

THE WORLD NOT CONVERTED

This glorious testimony which has been given throughout the age by the witnesses of Jesus has not converted the world, nor will it now convert the world. It was not God's plan that it should—his will being that the chief accomplishment of this witness work would be the reaching and development of

those who would join this special class and prove worthy to live and reign with Christ.

Incidentally, others have heard, and to some extent have been blessed. Thus they have been in a measure prepared for the blessings of the kingdom which will reach the world during the kingdom. Millions of others have also heard the message, but have paid no attention to it—yet it has been a witness even to these. Jesus said that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end [of the Gospel Age] come.”—Matt. 24:14

Jesus likened his individual witnesses to candles shining in the dark. We know that a candle does not project its light any great distance into the darkness. It is of benefit only to those who are close to it. Similarly, the light of the Gospel shining through Jesus’ witnesses is a guide and a great blessing to those who, by belief and devotion, draw near to it and to the Lord whom it represents. The outside world, however, sees only an indistinct glimmer.

As Jesus explained, the darkness of this world “hateth the light,” and therefore those who dwell in darkness usually turn away from the light even when they see it. (John 3:19,20) Satan is largely responsible for this. As the god of this world, he has blinded the minds of those who 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

Someone has said that the light of the Gospel as it shines through the witnesses of Jesus is like a lighthouse at the edge of the ocean. It is not put there to light up the ocean, but to guide the mariner. Thus, the Truth was not intended to enlighten the

world during the Gospel Age, although it has been the only light in the world. This light, however, has been a guide to God's own people, enabling them to find and to walk in the "narrow" way which leads to "glory and honour and immortality."—Matt. 7:14; Rom. 2:7

"AS THE SUN"

Through Jesus' witnesses of the present age, the Gospel is preached until "the end" comes—the end of the age. Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares also speaks of the end of the age. The witnesses of Jesus are, in this parable, called "children of the kingdom," and when the work of the harvest is fully consummated, these "children of the kingdom" are said to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."—Matt. 13:38,43

This shining forth as the sun will be in association with Jesus, the foretold "Sun of righteousness" who is to arise with "healing in his wings" to enlighten and bless the whole world of mankind. (Mal. 4:2) The faithful witnesses of Jesus will become, as the church triumphant, a part of that "Sun of righteousness," and together with Jesus will cause the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth, "as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9; 40:5

When the "Sun of righteousness" arises with "healing in his wings," and the "children of the kingdom" shine forth with him, Satan will be bound, that he may "deceive the nations no more." (Rev. 20:1-3) With the ruler of darkness thus prevented from interfering with the shining forth of light from that glorious Sun, all the world will have an unrestricted

opportunity to become acquainted with Jehovah, the true God, and with his beloved Son who died for them that they might live. Then will be testified to all that great truth that Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:4-6

The work of enlightening all mankind will require the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom. First, the living generation will have turned to them the “pure language” mentioned by the Prophet Zephaniah. (Zeph. 3:8,9) This will be immediately after the “fire of [God’s] jealousy” has destroyed the symbolic earth—that is, its present evil systems—in the great “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1

Many who go through that fiery trouble will be quite ignorant of the true God, hence the necessity of having the pure message of truth given to them in order that they might have an opportunity to know and serve God properly, “with one consent.” However, that will be only the beginning. There will then come the awakening of the many billions who have died. As each generation of these hears the voice of the Lord calling them forth from the tomb, they also will need to be enlightened. Thus, although the Sun will be shining throughout the kingdom, it will not be until near its close that the vestiges of darkness from the long night of sin and death will have been fully banished from the minds of all the people.

The Prophet Zechariah gives us a beautiful illustration of this. He speaks of the thousand years of Christ’s reign—that period during which the Sun of righteousness will be shining—as a “day.” He says, “it shall be one day which shall be known to the

LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—Zech. 14:7

“It shall be in that day,” the prophet continues, “that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.” (vs. 8) These living waters are spoken of in Revelation 22:1,2 as a “river,” which will flow from the “throne of God and of the Lamb.” On either side of the river is pictured the symbolic “tree of life,” bearing all needed life-giving fruit, and “the leaves of the tree” are “for the healing of the nations.” It will be then that the invitation is proclaimed to all people, “Come. . . . take the water of life freely.”—vs. 17

Thus, in this beautiful combination of symbols, the future work of the present witnesses of Jesus is portrayed. At the present time, our message to all who fully believe is to take up their cross and follow Jesus into death. Soon, the work of selecting this faithful class—the Christ, head and body—will be complete. Then, the light concerning God’s plan will be revealed to all mankind, and they will be given the opportunity to drink of the life-giving waters proceeding from his throne. Finally, the grand culmination of the search for God’s people will come to pass, and the full meaning of these words will be manifest. “In the dispensation of the fulness of times,” Paul says, God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph. 1:10 ■

*“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us
therefore cast off the works of darkness,
and let us put on the armour of light.
Let us walk honestly, as in the day.”
Romans 13:12,13*