

“What Hast Thou Done?”

*“Pilate answered,
... Thine own
nation and the
chief priests have
delivered thee unto
me: what hast
thou done?”
—John 18:35*

ORDINARILY WHEN AN innocent person is brought before a judge and accused of wrongdoing, he is quick to deny the charge. If asked, as Jesus was, “What hast thou done?” human wisdom dictates that the answer should

be, “I have done nothing.” Jesus did not reply thus to Pilate, whose question is recorded in our opening text. Our Lord was not there to defend himself, and he could not truthfully say that he had done nothing. He had spent three and a half years doing many wonderful things. Yet, his actions had aroused the hatred of Israel’s religious leaders, and now they had brought him before Pilate and demanded that he be crucified.

Jesus had committed no crimes that could be justly charged against him, but he had been active in doing good. He had healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, cast out demons, opened blind eyes, and even raised the dead. Equally praiseworthy, the gracious words which he spoke had helped to loosen the shackles of superstition that had been bound upon Israel by their

hypocritical leaders. Jesus' works of grace and goodness were appreciated by many of the common people who heard him gladly. His popularity rose to the point where the Pharisees became fearful that if he were left alone the whole world would become his followers.—Matt. 4:23-25; Mark 12:37; John 11:47,48; 12:19

Therefore, Jesus was hated by those who felt their position of power and authority in the nation would be jeopardized by his teachings and works of righteousness. As members of the fallen race, motivated by selfishness and unrighteous ambitions, they were utterly unable to appreciate the Master's selfless viewpoint and untiring zeal for the blessing of others. To them, Jesus was a misfit. The precepts he taught and his example exposed their own unrighteousness and in time might put an end to their practices of selfishness and evil. They wanted to put a stop to his going about doing good, and thus they cried out to Pilate, "Crucify him, crucify him."—John 19:6

THE LEPER CLEANSED

While Pilate probably knew in a general way something of the Master's activities throughout Judea, his question, "What hast Thou done?" was no doubt a sincere effort on his part to get a better understanding of what it was that had caused the religious leaders of Israel to rise up against him and demand his death. As for the priests and Pharisees themselves, however, there was no need for them to seek information concerning the details of Jesus' life, because he had seen to it that they were witnesses to his activities. As evidence of this, after Jesus had performed the miracle of cleansing a leper, he said to him, "Tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself

to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.”—Matt. 8:1-4

From this we see that the Master was not interested in promoting himself in the eyes of the public. However, he did desire that those who sat in Moses’ seat, Israel’s religious leaders, should be aware of what he was doing. He was careful that his benefactions were reported to the priest in keeping with the spirit of the law given through Moses. In this, as in the other miracles performed by Jesus, there is revealed an utter lack of any desire or effort on his part to be personally benefited. He was not willing to use the divine power at his command on behalf of himself, but on all appropriate occasions he was glad of the opportunity to bless others.

The first suggestion made to the Master that he perform a miracle came from Satan. (Matt. 4:1-4) Jesus had been fasting for forty days and was understandably hungry. Satan appeared, and suggested that the Master use the power now at his command to turn stones into bread, so that he could satisfy his hunger. Since no one would be benefited but himself, and because it would reveal a lack of faith in the manner in which God was caring for all of his interests, Jesus turned down this suggestion. However, when the leper came to him, saying, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” Jesus said to him, “I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

The religious leaders of the Jews hoped to discover that in some way Jesus was seeking to promote or benefit himself by the good he was doing. If so, they might find a way to appeal to his selfishness and arrange to cooperate with him in a way that would

serve their own selfish interests as well as his. However, no selfish compromise could be suggested to Jesus, who was willing to devote his whole life purely to the interests of others. To these leaders, there was only one way to deal with one like this, and that was to put him out of the way.

SIMPLICITY IN SERVICE

The spirit of selfishness which motivated Israel's leaders was further manifested in their carefulness to have what little good they selfishly did be seen and heard of by men. This was not so with Jesus. The spirit of God which was in him produced a beautiful simplicity and straight-forwardness in what he did that was calculated to divert attention from himself, and to direct it toward God, the giver of every good and perfect gift.—James 1:17

When a centurion came to Jesus, informing him that his servant was “at home sick of the palsy,” Jesus' simple reply was, “I will come and heal him.” (Matt. 8:5-7) There was no bargaining, and no request that the miracle be publicized. No hint was made that the centurion, by accepting this favor, would be placed under obligation, nor was there any attempt to gain from him a pledge of future support. All the tactics by which a selfish world has perverted charity and turned it into gainful exploitation were utterly lacking in Jesus.

A few verses later, we read, “When Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.” Here again, there was no show nor unnecessary commotion. A human being was in need of help, and Jesus came to her aid. Indeed, the Master had come into the world that through him all might

one day have health and life. From this standpoint, he did not consider the healing of Peter's mother-in-law to be extraordinary. Thus we read that he unpretentiously "touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose."—Matt. 8:14,15

Following this, "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (vss. 16,17) It would seem that in spite of the fact that Jesus made no effort to impress the people with his miracle-working powers, his fame had spread. By the close of this day he found himself the center of attraction, and his popularity increasing. The Master, however, was not seeking this result. This is apparent from the verse 18, which reads, "When Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart."

The plan of God reveals that in due time all men will be drawn to Jesus. He is the "true Light," which will yet "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9) The Lord was not desirous, however, that the multitudes be drawn to him nor be attracted merely because of the temporary good he was able to bestow upon them. The drawing of all men in his Father's due time was to be based, as Jesus explained, upon the fact that he would be lifted up as man's Redeemer and sin-bearer, even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. (Num. 21:7-9; John 3:14,15) This supreme example of love, even the sacrificing of his life that the world through him might have forgiveness of sin,

must be the real drawing power for those who come unto God through Jesus. Furthermore, in so coming it is necessary that one not only appreciate the unselfish sacrifice of the Master, but that he himself partake of the spirit of unselfish love that prompted it.

Jesus recognized that most in the crowds which followed him for the loaves and the fishes, and the benefits of his miracle-working power, were not ready to recognize their need of sin atonement. (John 6:26) They were glad to obtain all they could from him, but few were willing to sacrifice their lives for the unselfish cause which he represented.

When Jesus arranged to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to remove himself from the multitudes, we are told that “a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Matt. 8:19) Most religious leaders would have been flattered and pleased with this expression of devotion and pledge of support, but not Jesus. His reply to the scribe was calculated to cause the would-be disciple to change his mind unless he had truly caught the spirit of the Master’s teachings and example, and was ready to follow in his steps of self-sacrifice. Jesus said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (vs. 20) The scribe could get no other implication from these words except that if he followed Jesus he, too, would have no place to lay his head, and from the world’s standpoint would be homeless and an outcast. Such is the cost of a life of doing good in this present selfish and sinful world.

UNTIRING BENEVOLENCE

The good works of the Master were not occasional incidents, but his life's habits. He was never too occupied to give heed to the needs of those who came to him for help. Not only did he use the miracle-working power of God which was at his command to heal the sick and raise the dead, but he gave all his own strength as well. Unselfishly and generously did he thus give, that his perfect human body was fully used up in his short ministry of three and a half years.

Jesus' ministry was along the line later suggested by the Apostle Paul as being proper during this Gospel Age, namely, that of doing good unto all men. However, the Master devoted his special care and attention to his own disciples, who were in training to carry on as the household of faith following his return to heaven. Thus we read, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:10

Matthew 9:18-38 gives us another interesting view of the Master's life, showing how he spent his time, and his unselfish interest in the people for whom he was laying down his life. Verse 18 tells of a ruler whose daughter had died, and of his request that Jesus lay his hand upon her that she might live. In response to this plea for help, Jesus followed the ruler. One going on such an important mission, as Jesus was, to raise the dead, would ordinarily not wish to be interfered with or delayed by matters less important. Jesus, though, was not like ordinary fallen men, who often become so impressed with the importance of their immediate undertakings that they lose sight of the human needs with which they are surrounded.

While on his way to raise the ruler's daughter from the dead, a woman who had been diseased for twelve years came behind Jesus and touched the hem of his garment. He turned around, and when he saw her said, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour." (vs. 22) Then Jesus went on to the ruler's house, and despite the derision heaped upon him by the "minstrels and the people," he proceeded with the work at hand, and awakened the maid from the sleep of death.—vss. 23-25

The fame of this miracle spread throughout the region, and with further results. First, two blind men followed him, asking to have their sight restored. Then others sought help for a man possessed with a devil who could not speak. (vss. 26-33) These good works done by the Master were gaining such popularity for him that the Pharisees began denigrating the value of the miracles by claiming that he was casting out devils through the "prince of devils." (vs. 34) Their effort failed, however, because the time for Jesus' rejection and death had not come. He was still to enjoy a season of measurable popularity with the people, during which he could continue to preach the Gospel message, and to give illustrations by his miracles of the blessings that were to come to all mankind in God's due time. Thus we read, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people."—vs. 35

What a following Jesus could have obtained for himself, and what power in Israel he could have wielded, had he so desired. It would be even so today.

Individuals who profess the ability to heal the sick, often draw large crowds to their meetings. If these so-called miracles were genuine, as were those of the Master, the whole world would soon be following the man, or group, who could thus heal diseases, and especially if they could also raise the dead.

Jesus knew that this would be true in his case. Indeed, it became true to the limited extent that the Master permitted it. However, he was not then undertaking to convert the world, nor had the time come for the blessings of restitution to be dispensed to all mankind. He rejoiced in the privilege of providing samples of kingdom blessings, but it was not time for the floodgates of the river of life to be opened for the healing of the nations.—Rev. 22:1,2

In the miracles he performed, and his attitude toward the people displayed in connection therewith, we see manifested the real spirit of Christ. His genuine concern was not just for those he was specially instructing as apostles, but also for the larger number who had no deeper interest in him than the material blessings he was able to give them. We read, “When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.”—Matt. 9:36-38

IN HIS STEPS

Jesus’ request that his disciples pray for the “Lord of the harvest” to send forth reapers reveals that those who truly follow him are invited to join in his

works of grace and love. Later, he said, “He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” (John 14:12) Those who are filled with the Master’s spirit of self-sacrifice and are faithful in following him into death by laying down their lives for others will, in the kingdom, share with him in the work of healing all the sick and raising all the dead. The healing of the people in that day will be permanent, and those who are awakened from the sleep of death will have the opportunity of living forever if they will obey. All the true followers of Jesus will then share with him in doing works far greater than those which he performed at his First Advent.

Even now, in order that we may demonstrate the spirit by which we are controlled, God gives us the opportunity to do all we can toward opening spiritually blind eyes and unstopping spiritually deaf ears. We also now may use the Word of reconciliation to cleanse away the leprosy of sin. Those dead in trespasses and sins may even now, by accepting the Gospel message proclaimed by the members of the body of Christ, be awakened to righteousness and have their mortal bodies quickened by the spirit to serve the living God.—II Cor. 5:18,19; Eph. 2:1-5

Today, those who zealously lay down their lives in seeking to bless their fellowmen, will not be held in high esteem by the religiously influential of our time. It is far better, though, that the servant of God have heaped upon him the reproaches of the world on account of his going about doing good, than to be placed in a position where he would need to confess that, while called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Gospel, he had done

little or nothing about it so far as the blessing of others was concerned.

PROPER SUFFERING

For the followers of Christ, persecution and suffering for “well doing,” not for “evil doing,” are evidences of God’s favor and constitute important witnesses of the Spirit that we are the children of God. (I Pet. 3:17) Yet, let us not be so concerned merely with the desire to suffer that we are induced to do foolhardy or wrong things in order to elicit the opposition of others. The Gospel accounts of the Master’s life indicate clearly that while the religious rulers of that day finally were successful in causing him to be put to death, yet there were long periods of his ministry during which he was comparatively free from opposition.

It would be tragic for a Christian, in order to avoid the ill-will of the world, or to maintain a respectable standing in his community, to refrain from faithfulness in proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom. As followers of the Master, there is no other course that will have God’s approval except that of emulating his example. His pattern was preeminently that of interest in others, at the cost of sacrifice to himself. Jesus was consumed by the zeal of his Father’s house. (Ps. 69:9) His was a zeal for doing good, and for manifesting the spirit of divine love which prompted his Father to send him into the world, that through him mankind might have life. For us not to be interested in this viewpoint, and not to be concerned for the well-being of others, especially in connection with their understanding of God, would manifest a lack of the divine spirit by which

we will be conformed more and more into the image of God's dear Son.—Rom. 8:29

The Apostle Peter, in a moment of supreme test, and without the aid of the Holy Spirit, denied the Lord. Nevertheless, through his association with the Master, and by observing the unselfishness of his example and the wisdom of his methods, learned well the lesson of love which leads to the laying down of life for others. Years later, Peter expressed himself on the subject, saying, "What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."—I Pet. 2:20-22

We should note well the many Scriptural declarations that if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with him. (Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) Let us also remember that the only basis for true Christian suffering is for doing good, not for doing evil, nor for doing nothing. When we suffer for doing good, and take it patiently, with rejoicing, faithfully even unto death, we are thereby demonstrating our wholehearted devotion to God, and to the spirit of divine love which must rule supreme in all those who will be blessed with the "crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

It will be the church's privilege, during the Messianic kingdom, to instruct the world of mankind in the advantages of this way of life. Hence, all its members must qualify in advance to share in such a glorious program of education, a program by which

the knowledge of the glory of God will be caused to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

While the world of mankind, when restored to human perfection, will not be called upon to suffer for doing good, they will need to learn and to practice the principle of love in their dealings with others. This is revealed in the Master's prophetic explanation, as we find it in the parable of the sheep and the goats. To those who are invited to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, Jesus explains that the basis of their acceptableness is the fact that they had manifested their interest in others.—Matt. 25:34-40

The "sheep" of the parable had not busied themselves in acts of kindness with the hope of receiving special recognition, but had cooperated in the restitution project because they imbibed the spirit of God who planned it. They had been so wholehearted in the manifestation of the love which ruled their hearts that they were surprised to learn they had done that which merited their inheritance of the restored paradise. Like the true followers of Christ of this age, they entered into eternal life, not because they had merely refrained from doing evil, nor because, like the goats, they had done nothing, but because they had visited and cared for their brethren—their fellowman.

Let us remember Pilate's question to Jesus, "What hast Thou done?" May it serve as a reminder to us that there are indeed many good things for us to do during our earthly sojourn. By thus engaging in such activities, let us strive to prove worthy to suffer and reign with Christ. ■