

Honor, Shame and Glory

*“As they heard
these things, he
added and spake a
parable, because he
was nigh to
Jerusalem, and
because they
thought that the
kingdom of God
should
immediately
appear.”
—Luke 19:11*

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 4, THE

Christian world will commemorate the resurrection of Jesus. One week prior to this, many will observe what is known as Palm Sunday, in remembrance of Jesus' triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. It was on this occasion that he was hailed as King by his friends and followers, when they “took

branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (John 12:13) It was a moment of high honor in the life of Jesus. The Pharisees, in their selfish jealousy, were greatly disturbed by the situation, and said, “Behold, the world is gone after him.”—vs. 19

The royal, or kingly, promises of God had all been made to the nation of Israel. It was to this nation that Jesus came in fulfillment of these promises.

For this reason, it was essential that he should present himself formally to the nation as king. Indeed, it had been foretold that he would do this, and it was essential that the prophecy be fulfilled. (Zech. 9:9) Jesus' disciples and friends were highly elated over this experience, for to them it meant that the Messianic kingdom was soon to make its appearance in power and great glory.

Jesus' followers, however, did not understand at that time the series of events that must take place before the Messianic kingdom could be set up. As Jesus said to two of them after his resurrection, they had been "slow of heart to believe" all that the prophets had spoken, that he would first have to suffer and die, and only then would he "enter into his glory."—Luke 24:19-26

Just prior to his entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had related to his disciples a parable, which, had they comprehended its meaning, would have taught them not to expect the kingdom at that time. It was the parable of the pounds. The opening words of the parable state: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us."—Luke 19:12-14

This is the parable referred to in our opening text—the one which was given for the very purpose of alerting the disciples to the fact that the "citizens" of king Jesus, the Jewish nation, would hate him, and would not have him rule over them. Thus, for the time at least, the intended purpose of the parable

was not accomplished. Later, just a few days before Jesus' death, the disciples began to realize, through the compelling logic of events, that their king was hated, and that he might indeed be killed. They now seemed to remember vaguely that the parable had said the king would go away, and later return. This is evident when they came to Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and asked, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek: *parousia*, or presence], and of the end of the world [Greek: *aion*, or age]?"—Matt. 24:3

This seems to indicate that for the moment, at least, they had grasped the idea that Jesus was going away, and that he would return at some future time. However, their spiritual vision was not entirely clear, for when Jesus subsequently was put to death only days later, they were scattered and perplexed.

If the disciples had not been "slow of heart to believe," they would have known not only that Jesus was going away, but that he would be taken away from them by death. At about the same time as when his friends hailed him as king, and the Pharisees became concerned that the whole world had "gone after him," certain Greeks sought an audience with the Master. The disciples reported this to him, and his response was, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."—John 12:20-24

These words must have sounded strange to the disciples. Doubtless they thought that their Master was already in the process of being glorified. Had

not the crowd shouted, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord?” Jesus knew, though, that this was not his real glorification. Before he could actually be glorified, he must die as the Redeemer of the world, for otherwise, like the “corn of wheat,” he would remain alone. Conceivably, through the exercise of divine power, Jesus could have established his kingdom at that time. Had he done so without dying to redeem the human race from death, however, he alone would have eternal life, while all his subjects would continue to die.

A few days later, on the night before his death, Jesus explained to the disciples that he was going away to “prepare a place” for them, and added, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Answering on behalf of the confused disciples, Thomas said, “We know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:2-5) Thomas’ reply clearly showed that, here again, the disciples had not yet grasped the fact that Jesus was to die, be raised from the dead, and be glorified as a divine being, nor did they yet know the way to glory, although they had been invited to follow him.

Only a short time earlier the mother of James and John had asked if her two sons could sit, one on Jesus’ right hand, and the other on his left hand, in his kingdom. Jesus explained that to share his glory it would be necessary to drink his “cup” of suffering and be “baptized” with him into death. (Matt. 20:20-22) James and John said they were willing to go through these experiences. Their understanding of what was implied was evidently vague, however, since as we have just seen, only days later

Thomas admitted that they did not truly know the “way” to the place of glory to which Jesus was going.

“IF I BE LIFTED UP”

In another effort to prepare his disciples for the fact that he would be taken away from them in death, Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” To this the people answered, “We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?” (John 12:32-34) The wording of the above passage seems to indicate that those who asked this question were not Jesus’ disciples, yet they understood from his remark that he expected to die.

As the people remarked, however, they understood from the Old Testament that Christ, the Messiah, would not die, but would continue forever. The disciples had accepted Jesus as Christ, so they, too, were sure that he would not die. As a result, their great faith in him as being the Messiah of promise was one of the things which tended to obscure from them the meaning of all that he said relating to the fact of his death and the establishment of his kingdom at a later time. The disciples were confused by what seemed to them a “hard saying,” and hence were unable to see and appreciate its fuller unfolding.—John 6:60

The Messiah will, indeed, abide forever, but first it was necessary that he should die to redeem those over whom he would reign. It is true, as stated in Isaiah 9:6,7, that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,” but before he

could draw all men unto him it was necessary that he be lifted up upon the cross to die, the “just for the unjust.” (I Pet. 3:18) Thus it was that although Jesus’ disciples loved him dearly and would gladly have given their lives to save him from death, yet when he came to the end of the way, “all the disciples forsook him.” That is, none of them were able to understand the significance of what was taking place. —Matt. 26:56

Shame and ignominy were heaped upon the Master. He was derided, blasphemed and beaten. A crown of thorns was pressed upon his bleeding head. On the cross he was further ridiculed, but one of the thieves being crucified with him noted the inscription at the top of the cross stating that Jesus was a king. Grasping at a straw of hope, the thief said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” —Luke 23:42

How clearly the Master had the whole situation in mind! In the parable he had shown that he would go into a “far country,” and upon returning he would establish his kingdom. Now, although he was dying, he possessed unbounded faith in his Father’s plan. He knew that he would receive the promised kingdom, and that its control over the affairs of men would reestablish paradise conditions worldwide. He knew that even the dead would be raised and have an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of that kingdom, and that the thief would thus have the same prospect. Grasping this occasion to give a witness for the Truth, even as he was dying, Jesus replied to the thief, “Verily I say unto thee this day: With me, shalt thou be in Paradise.” —vs. 43, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

Jesus' final words on the cross were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"—that is, my life. (vs. 46) Thus died the king of glory. All nature seemed to join in the mourning. The ground shook, the sky was darkened, and so were the minds of his trusting, and now bewildered, followers. (Matt. 27:51; Luke 23:44,45) The one whom they so surely thought would live forever had died. It was a grim and confusing climax to that series of events which had crowded into his last few days and, paradoxically, began with his riding heroically into Jerusalem as king, accompanied by the cheers of the people, his disciples and friends. They had honored and exalted him, but now his enemies had killed him.

NOW GLORIFIED

True to God's Word, and to Jesus' own testimony prior to his death, he rose again on the third day, and was exalted to sit at the right hand of the throne of his Father. (Ps. 110:1-7; Rom. 8:34; Matt. 16:21; Phil. 2:8-11) Shortly after the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter related the entire matter most eloquently. Speaking to those who had witnessed the miracle of healing a man lame from his birth, he said, "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses."—Acts 3:13-15

After his resurrection Jesus himself announced, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

(Matt. 28:18) However, he did not then exercise that power by establishing the long-promised kingdom. Instead, and as he had foretold in the parable, after he appeared to his disciples a few times over a period of forty days, he “went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.” (Acts 1:1-3; Luke 19:12) Jesus commissioned his disciples that, during this intervening time, they were to be his witnesses throughout the entire world, proclaiming the fact that, in due time, he would return to establish his kingdom, through which all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 3:20-25

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples to empower them properly to represent their absent Lord. By its enlightening influence, great truths stated to them by Jesus, and outlined by the prophets, became understandable. They now saw clearly what Jesus meant by “taking up their cross” and following him into death. (Matt. 16:24) How could they, prior to this, know the meaning of dying with Jesus when they did not believe he would die? Their only thought then was that they would reign with him, and that his reign was imminent.

Now the disciples knew that they would have to drink of his “cup” and be baptized with his “baptism” in order to prove worthy of reigning with him. Thus, they began to preach this to those who had ears to hear. They no longer had any illusions that the kingdom would be immediately set up. They knew that Jesus had gone into the “far country” of the parable, even heaven itself; and as all their hopes of life and glory centered in his promise to return,

they looked forward to his “glorious appearing,” while daily they presented their bodies a living sacrifice in his service.—Tit. 2:13; Rom. 12:1

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death, the church began to lose sight of the glorious hope of the Master’s return. Ignoring his teachings on the subject, many tried to imagine that the kingdom of Christ was merely a holy influence in the lives of believers. Thus, they concluded that when the whole world became believers, his kingdom would have fully come. Others ambitiously endeavored to exercise kingly authority through the arm of civil power. Between these two blinding errors, the hope of Christ’s return to set up his kingdom was lost by the vast majority of his professed followers.

Jesus expected that matters would turn out this way and related a number of parables in which he foretold these misinterpretations of the kingdom hope. Speaking of his return, he asked whether he would, when that time came, “find the faith upon the earth.” (Luke 18:8, *Young’s Literal Translation*) Many still profess to believe in his teachings, but they have little hope that divine power will actually be used to establish his kingdom. Millions this year, as every year, will go to church on April 4 as a token of their belief that Jesus was raised from the dead, unmindful of the fact that God’s power did not cease to operate for the ultimate blessing of mankind when that mighty miracle was performed.

Yet this is the real essence of the resurrection story to all who know the plan of God and have confidence in his ability to perform all his good pleasure. The fact that Jesus, the Messiah of promise, was killed did not interfere with the outworking of

God's plan. Likewise, neither do twenty centuries of bloodshed among the nations, and divisions, strife, and persecution among the professed people of God, mean that the fulfillment of his kingdom promises has failed, or has been delayed.

To us the risen Christ is a sure token that all of God's good purposes will come to pass! Today, the fulfillment of prophetic signs provided to us in the Scriptures indicate that Jesus' invisible return has occurred, and that his kingdom is very near. Truly, then, our hearts should burn within us as we meditate on the kingdom theme, discuss it with one another, and proclaim it to the whole world. As shown in the parable, it is after the king's return that he reckons with his servants, and it is our privilege now to prove our worthiness of reigning with him by faithfully using the opportunities and privileges which he has entrusted to us.

The commission Jesus gave to his disciples to preach the Gospel is just as binding upon us as it was upon them. When the women first met the risen Lord by the empty tomb, the instruction of the angel to them was, "Tell his disciples." (Mark 16:7) Thus, today, our message still is, "The Lord is risen indeed." (Luke 24:34) By this greatest of all miracles, the Heavenly Father manifested his ability to perform all his good pleasure. Now we can bear witness to the fact that God's miracle-working power will continue to operate for the establishment and manifestation of the Messianic kingdom, and that the hope of the world does not rest in the frustrated plans and efforts of the institutions of men.

When the women bore the glad tidings of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples, their message was at

first looked upon as “idle tales.” (Luke 24:11) It is still thus with the majority of those to whom we bear witness. Some believe, however, and as the continued failure of human plans becomes more and more apparent, greater numbers will perhaps give ear to the tidings that soon God’s good will toward all the families of the earth will be revealed by the “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.”—Rev. 22:1

Therefore, let us continue to tell the glad tidings in every way we can. Cooperatively, let us continue to tell it over the printed page, radio, television, the internet, and other forms of electronic media. Individually, let us be on the alert to use every opportunity afforded us to share the glorious Gospel of the kingdom message with our families, neighbors and friends. Never before have there been such golden opportunities for making known the glad tidings worldwide.

It was difficult for the disciples in Jesus’ day to realize that the kingdom was not then immediately to appear, but no longer is this true. The fulfillment of many prophecies indicates that Christ’s kingdom “is near, even at the doors.” (Matt. 24:33) The wrath of the enemies that slew Jesus has been overruled by God for the redemption of the world, and he has been raised from the dead and glorified. He no longer remains in the “far country.” Even now he is reckoning with his servants and has served his household “meat in due season.” (vs. 45) Therefore, let us not hold back from proving our worthiness of being “glorified together” with him, that we may live and reign with him in his kingdom, for the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Rom. 8:17; Rev. 20:4,6; 21:1-4 ■