

# Lights in the World

*“Do all things  
without  
murmurings and  
disputings: That ye  
may be blameless  
and harmless, the  
sons of God,  
without rebuke, in  
the midst of a  
crooked and  
perverse nation,  
among whom ye  
shine as lights in  
the world.”  
—Philippians  
2:14,15*

**THE THOUGHT UPPER-**  
most in the hearts of those who know the Gospel message is one of thanksgiving to God for opening the eyes of their understanding to know and appreciate his glorious plan of salvation. (Ps. 100:3-5) This spirit of thankfulness is bound to overflow, not only in direct praise to God for his abounding grace, but also in showing forth his praise to as many others as possible. Those into whose

hearts the Lord has shined and who, in turn, are reflecting the illumination of his Word in order that others around them might see it, are to shine forth in the dark world of today and not hide their light “under a bushel.”—Matt. 5:14-16

There should be no question in the minds of enlightened Christians as to the nature of the

message which should be proclaimed at the present time; for now, as ever, it should be nothing short of the Gospel of the kingdom. (Matt. 24:14) The incentive for preaching this Gospel should be no other than love for God and a desire to bless those who may have ears to hear and hearts to respond to the message. It is highly important to keep these viewpoints in mind, else there may be danger that in our zeal we may place ourselves in the unfortunate position of being energetic, yet “unapproved,” ambassadors.—I Cor. 9:27, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

Jesus was persecuted, and we desire to be like Jesus. The apostles and others in the Early Church were also persecuted, and we want to follow them as they followed Christ. We know that it is only “through much tribulation” that we may hope to enter the heavenly kingdom; it is only if “we suffer with him” that we will also “reign with him.”—Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:12

These thoughts are scriptural, and should weigh heavily in our Christian thinking, but they should not be allowed to outweigh other important truths pertaining to the proper attitude of the Christian in this world of darkness. Persecution alone is not an evidence of being on the Lord’s side. It would be comparatively easy to stir up the wrath of the world against ourselves if that were the only consideration. However, the question we should ask ourselves is whether we are suffering “for righteousness’ sake” or for our own misguided efforts.—I Pet. 2:20; 3:14,17

The Lord’s people should always walk in the true path of righteousness. (Rom. 8:1-10) It is something that we will do well to remember. At present, the Gospel of the kingdom is being heralded by the

printed page, radio, television, the Internet and many other forms of electronic media, yet in much of the world there is seemingly not a great deal of outward opposition to it. There is indifference, but little active persecution. Because of this we might conclude that our message is not useful.

What did Jesus mean when he said that his followers were to be the “light of the world?” (Matt. 5:14) What did Paul mean in our opening verse when he said that we “shine as lights in the world?” Do any of the Scriptures which bear on the Christian’s commission as an ambassador for Christ suggest he is to be a crusader in the world? There is much in the world that is wrong and against which we could find fault, but is it in this manner that we are to shine as lights? If so, how shall we decide which particular wrongs in the world we are to address? Shall we crusade against political corruption, immorality, social injustice, drug traffic, to name only a few?

The reality of war and the many threats of one nation toward another are continually thundered around the world. The masses do not want war, but the international situation is such that nations and their people are in constant danger of being sucked into the terrible abyss of armed conflict and its awful results. Here is something that every sincere Christian could easily be in open rebellion against, but is this what the Lord wants?

## **OUR EXEMPLAR**

What would Jesus do? This is a question that each one of us should seriously ask ourselves as we consider the nature of the message that we are commissioned to proclaim in the violent and distressed

world of today. One of the first messages Jesus gave when he began his ministry was delivered in a synagogue in Nazareth. It was based on Isaiah 61:1-3. This is a prophecy concerning Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit—his commission for service. It is also our commission; for as members of Christ's "body" we receive of the same anointing that came upon him.

What is included in this divine authorization? "The LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

When Jesus said to his audience in Nazareth that this scripture was "fulfilled in your ears," he did not quote all of it, stopping just before it mentions the "day of vengeance." (Luke 4:16-21) There was good reason for this, for that part of the commission has its particular application at the time in which we are now living rather than when Jesus conducted his personal ministry. This expression is one of those that indicates the significance of the great "time of trouble" with which this "present evil world" comes to an end.—Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22; Gal. 1:4

In a study of this entire commission, several points come to light. One is that it calls for the proclamation of the whole Gospel. To specialize on some particular segment of the Word of God would not be in keeping with this divine instruction. It

calls for the proclamation of the “good tidings,” the great hope of man’s restoration; as well as the “high calling” of this age, the “acceptable year of the Lord.” (Phil. 3:14) These two great fundamentals of the Gospel cannot be presented properly and effectively without an explanation of man’s fall, his redemption through Christ, and his need for repentance and surrender to the Lord. This has been the work of the church throughout the present age, and every footstep follower of the Master is still bound by the same divine commission.

### **“THE DAY OF VENGEANCE”**

Now that we are at the end, or “harvest,” of the Gospel Age, there is added the responsibility of announcing the day of vengeance. This is not in reality an additional message, but more particularly a current application of the same glorious Gospel of the kingdom. It involves an explanation of present world conditions in the light of prophecy and emphasizes the fact that the kingdom of Christ is man’s only hope of survival. It is God’s day of retribution that is upon the nations and the broken down systems of the “present evil world” under Satan’s control.

To declare this aspect of the message does not imply pronouncing vengeance, nor does it call for a campaign of smiting condemnation against the evils of the crumbling world. The Scriptures clearly tell us that pronouncing and executing vengeance belongs only to God. (Ps. 94:1,2; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30) Generally speaking, the people already know how wrong the world is, but they do not know the basic causes of its insanity, nor do they have any

conception at all of the divine remedy—the kingdom of Christ. Only in the great plan of God is this information available, and it is our privilege to proclaim these glorious truths.

Our preaching of the day of vengeance consists in explaining as clearly as possible the meaning of present world chaos, that the judgments of God are upon the nations, and that soon Christ's kingdom will be established to bless and restore the people to health and life. Properly presented, the truth concerning this subject should be one of great comfort. It will "comfort all that mourn," and surely the world is filled with mourning ones today.

In Isaiah 35:4, the responsibility of the saints during this Time of Trouble is again mentioned. The text reads: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." Jesus said that at this time the hearts of the people would fail them for fear as they looked ahead to the things coming upon the earth. (Luke 21:26) It is our privilege, however, to say to as many of these as we can, "Fear not." We can say this by explaining that while the trouble now upon the earth is a manifestation of God's righteous vengeance, it is but preparatory to the blessings of Christ's kingdom, and the salvation of all the willing and obedient from sin and death.

## **MOURNERS IN ZION**

Isaiah 61:3 makes special mention of those who "mourn in Zion." These seem to be in addition to "all that mourn" mentioned in verse two. Zion was the highest point in Jerusalem and is spoken of in

the Psalms as where the people of God dwelt. (Ps. 48:1-3,11; 125:1; 132:13) Therefore, those who “mourn in Zion” evidently refer to those who, in one way or another, are associated with the professed people of God, and who are distressed over conditions with which they are surrounded, both in the world and in the church.

The same glorious message that comforts sorrowing ones in the world in proportion to their faith to believe it is also a satisfying portion to these who mourn in Zion. Indeed, it is especially so, because it provides an explanation for the confusing and disappointing situations in which they find themselves as a result of the church systems’ failure to convert the world. It is not that a special message needs to be directed to these, for God’s plan, the Gospel of the kingdom, suffices to accomplish this desired end, even as the same message accomplishes all the other objectives of the divine commission.

The term Zion is also sometimes used in the prophecies concerning God’s typical chosen people, those who are Israelites according to the flesh. (Lam. 1:3-8,17; Isa. 51:2,3) The kingdom message also reaches and comforts any among these who have ears to hear.

We are not to suppose, however, that the Lord’s commission implies that all who hear the message will be comforted, nor that every individual mourning in the world will even be reached by our efforts—although we should do all we can toward this end. The thought is, rather, that there are no restrictions on the scope of the commission. The whole world is the field of service, and in this time of darkness we are to let our light shine as brightly and as effectively as possible.

## FOR A WITNESS

Jesus said that “this gospel of the kingdom” would be preached in all the world for a “witness.” (Matt. 24:14) It is not to be expected that more than this will be accomplished. That feature of the Gospel pertaining to the “high calling” of this age is still reaching one here and there. Every effort should be made to nurture these and encourage them to run zealously for the “mark for the prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Indeed, no part of the Word of God should be held back from those who show a desire to learn the way of the Lord more perfectly. As for the people in general, we will find that our efforts have resulted largely in a witness, rather than in bringing large numbers into the full light of Truth.

This will be true with respect to both Jews and Gentiles. The prophecies clearly indicate that the Jews would return to the land of promise mostly in unbelief, and that they would remain in that condition until in the final phase of the great “time of trouble,” when the Lord would intervene to save them. (Jer. 16:14-16; 30:3-11; Zech. 14:1-3) In confirmation of this Paul declares that “blindness in part” was upon Israel “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” The reference here is to the completion of the true church, the “little flock” of the present age, the majority of which are Gentiles, as a result of the nation of Israel rejecting Jesus, their Messiah, at his First Advent.—Rom. 11:25-32; Luke 12:32; Acts 3:13-15

The work of selecting and completing the church, the “Bride of Christ,” is still going on. Thus, the “fulness of the Gentiles” has not yet come in, and

this explains why Israel is still in unbelief. It will remain so until their eyes are opened by the wonderful manner in which God will protect and deliver them in that future hour of their greatest peril. An occasional one may accept the Gospel message, even as is true among the Gentiles, and as has been true of both groups throughout the age. Aside from this, however, let us not expect that our message will result in more than a “witness” to those who hear.

### **“WITHOUT MURMURINGS”**

In our opening text, the apostle admonishes us to “do all things without murmurings and disputings.” How wise is this counsel! The world in which we are to shine as lights is filled with strife and violence, and in such a world our witness will be effective only in proportion to the wholesome influence of love and goodwill among ourselves as we proclaim the message. The Lord’s people should have but one objective in their labor of love, and there should be no reason for strife as together they lay down their lives showing forth the praises of God.

It is only thus, the apostle asserts, that will make us “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke.” If we continue faithfully to let our light shine in this dark and suffering world, sooner or later we are sure to be rebuked by those who sit in darkness. When it comes, however, it should be unmerited so far as any wrongdoing on our part is concerned. Our own conduct should be both harmless and blameless, hence without just cause for rebuke. We will not be reproved by the Lord if we are faithful to his Word and maintain the proper attitude of sympathy, understanding

and love, as we minister the kingdom message to others.

Faithful followers of the Master have never found themselves at home in the world. Its spirit is contrary to their spirit, and it is often a struggle to overcome the disposition of the world. This is especially true today. We are surrounded by turmoil and chaos, by violence and hatred, but let us rise above these in our association with one another and in our attitude toward those to whom we proclaim the message. Paul speaks of the "perverse nation" of his day, and now we have the privilege of shining as lights in a perverse world. We cannot do anything to hinder the fall of this present evil order, nor would we want to, but we can tell the people that a new world order is near.

The Prophet Isaiah, in symbolic language, describes this new world order of Christ's future kingdom of righteousness. "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." (Isa. 65:17) Peter confirms this wonderful feature of that kingdom which describes the new social order administered by Christ. "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II Pet. 3:13

We do not know how much longer we will have the privilege of shining as lights in the world. Therefore, let us make use of every opportunity we have, rejoicing in the realization that if faithful in doing the Lord's will now, we will be united with Christ beyond the veil, and together with him, "shine forth as the sun" in the kingdom of our Father. (Matt. 13:43) Then it will not be a case of

lights shining in the darkness, for the darkness will be dispelled by the glory of the “Sun of righteousness,” and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth, “as the waters cover the sea.”  
—Mal. 4:2; Isa. 11:9 ■