Glorious Hope of the Church

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."
—Romans 5:2

IN THIS SCRIPTURE THE Apostle Paul is speaking of the hope which the faithful followers of Christ have of receiving glory, which he points to as the 'glory of God.' To the brethren at Colosse he said, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."—Col. 1:27

To those at Corinth, Paul wrote, "If the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." (II Cor. 3:9-12) The hope of glory of which the apostle spoke (vss.7,8) was

represented by the radiance of Moses' countenance when he came down from the mount to inaugurate the typical Law Covenant with Israel.

During the present Gospel Age, God has been calling and selecting from among the fallen human family a bride class for his Son, our Lord Jesus. These faithful followers will share his glory in the future administration of the kingdom of righteousness, and the institution of the New Covenant for the blessing of the people.

These promises of glory are limited to a faith class to which Jesus refers when he said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) Those who make up this 'little flock' therefore, are the ones to whom these precious promises apply, those who are willing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and share in his sacrifice for sin.—Col. 1:24

THE RICH YOUNG NOBLEMAN

A very limited glimpse of the Bible's promises of glory may be seen in the conversation that took place between Jesus and the rich young ruler who came to him to ask the way to eternal life. This young ruler knew nothing of these special promises, but was familiar with the Law of Moses, which said, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." (Lev. 18:5) He knew that he was failing to obtain life by keeping the Law, as he had hoped to do. His failure to obtain life was perhaps becoming manifest in his declining health. He had heard of Jesus' power to perform miracles, and of the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth.

Apparently he was convinced that Jesus was a great teacher sent from God, and that perhaps he could point out a better way to life than that which was offered through the Law given by Moses.

Whatever the background of this rich young ruler's question may have been, the question itself clearly revealed the man's desire to find the secret of life, in order that he might not grow old and die. When Jesus questioned him concerning the Law, he assured the Master that he had made the best effort possible to abide by the requirements of the Law from the time that he was very young. The answer seems to imply that, in spite of his best efforts to keep Moses' Law, he realized that he was not obtaining the health and life which is promised to the obedient. It was because of this that he had come to Jesus to find out if there was anything else that he could do.

"Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." (Luke 18:22) Jesus' reply was no doubt a surprise to him for he was a rich man. Jesus assured him that if he did these things it would result in his receiving treasure in heaven. However, both the price that was to be paid, as well as the reward to follow, were beyond the ability of this man to appreciate and comprehend. The account says that he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions.

THE DISCIPLES' REACTION

It is interesting to note the reaction of the disciples to this conversation between Jesus and the rich

young nobleman. They had accepted Jesus as their Messiah who had been promised in the Old Testament prophecies. To them, he was the one who was destined to establish a kingdom that would rule over the whole earth. Through this kingdom, they believed all mankind were to be blessed. They no doubt knew of the angels' message on the night that Jesus was born, proclaiming him as the Savior of the world, and that because of his birth glad tidings were to go to all the families of the earth. With these thoughts in their minds as to the scope of the Lord's kingdom work, we can readily understand why they asked the question, "Who then can be saved?"—Matt. 19:25

The disciples thought that Jesus was to give salvation to all mankind. They knew that the prophecies indicated that he was to be king over the whole earth. Their prophet had said that he was the "arm" of the LORD which will be revealed in the "eyes of all the nations," and that because of this "all the ends of the earth" shall see the salvation of God. (Isa. 52:10) With this broad view of what was to be accomplished through the work of the Messiah, it was very difficult for the disciples to understand why it was that this young nobleman coming to Jesus to inquire the way to life should be given an answer so difficult to understand. He appeared to be making the way of salvation so hard that the man went away sorrowful.

Jesus explained to them that with man it would not be possible to accomplish, but that with God all things are possible. This implied that God was able to fulfill his promise to bless all nations, even though from the disciples' immediate viewpoint

something seemed to be out of harmony with this Divine intention.

The disciples were not satisfied, and they reminded our Lord that they too had left all to follow him, even as he had asked the young nobleman to do. They wanted to know what they were to receive as a result of the sacrifice they had made. Concerning this point, we read, "Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."—Matt. 19:28

THE HEAVENLY HOPE

In Jesus' answer we note two points of importance which help give a clearer vision of God's kingdom and purpose. In Jesus' statement to the rich young nobleman, he declares that if the great sacrifice was made by faithfully following him, he would then have treasure in heaven. The heavenly hope and spiritual promises were not easily understood, and the young nobleman had only asked how he could live on the earth, not how to lay up treasure in heaven.

The second important point is found in Jesus' statement to the disciples, in which he assures them that if they were faithful in giving up all and following him even unto death, they would sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This great privilege, as Jesus revealed, would be realized by the disciples in that period which he identified as the future time of regeneration [rebirth, #3824, *Strong's Bible Concordance*].—Matt. 19:28

The heavenly hope and the prospect of being enthroned with our Lord in his kingdom was thus introduced to the disciples. We note also that the fruition of this—the Christian's hope—does not mean the end of all hope for others. Jesus said that when the reward of the Christian is ultimately realized, a work of regeneration and judgment will then begin on behalf of the whole world of mankind.

PROMISES OF GLORY

Jesus, by explaining to the disciples that they would be enthroned with him and share his glory in the work of blessing mankind in the kingdom, was on the authority of the promises of God recorded in the Old Testament. Many of these promises are made only to Jesus himself, but when the Master through the Gospel brought life and immortality to light (II Tim. 1:10), he reveals that those who are faithful in following in his footsteps are to share with him the glory that is promised.—Col. 3:4

Thus Jesus, in his prayer toward the close of his ministry, said, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:22) The glory to which Jesus refers had at that time been given to him by promise. At the time he uttered this remarkable prayer, it was merely a 'hope of glory.' But to Jesus, who had implicit trust in his Heavenly Father's purpose, these promises were real. He knew that God's promises could not fail, and he spoke of the glory as having been already given to him. This wondrous glory of exaltation in the messianic kingdom was a part of the Divine plan for him, and there was no

doubt in his mind that it was to become a reality in his Father's ultimate plan.

One of these promises of glory recorded in the Old Testament was uttered by Jacob when he referred to the Messiah as "Shiloh" and declared that unto him would the "gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10) Isaiah also refers to the Master, "Unto us a child is born, . . . 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." (Isa. 9:6) In the same prophecy the prophet assures us, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall he no end."—vs. 7

Isaiah again spoke of the promises of glory. The Heavenly Father made the promise that he will exalt Jesus to his own right hand and give him "a portion with the great." (Isa. 53:12) Other Old Testament scriptures also note the many wondrous promises that are made on behalf of Jesus, all of which indicate the height of glory to which it was the Father's will to exalt him.

Jesus was to be given a 'portion with the great.' This is one of the promises showing that he would be exalted to the right hand of the throne of God as shown by the Apostle Paul. "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:9-11

This promised glory is seen to be twofold. It is a glory of the Divine nature, that when Jesus was

raised from the dead he became the "express image" of the Father's person. (Heb. 1:3) The Apostle Peter then refers to the promises made on behalf of Jesus' followers, and says that by these promises we are made "partakers of the divine nature."—II Pet. 1:4

Secondly, it is a glory of office. Jesus, who is now raised to immortality, the 'express image' of his Father, is also a great king, priest, and judge. As such he is to rule the world of mankind in his kingdom. The apostle declares that to him 'every knee should bow' and 'every tongue should confess' him. Paul was quoting from Isaiah 45:23. God makes this declaration of glory concerning himself, but Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit shows that it will be fulfilled through Jesus. Thus we have another scriptural example of how Jesus partakes of the glory of God.

REWARDING THE STRONG

The prophet said that God promised that Jesus would be given a portion with the great and that he in turn would divide the reward with the strong. This is one of the fundamental promises that gives Jesus the authority to assure his disciples that if they were faithful in following him into death they would share with him in his kingdom glory. The promises of God also gave Jesus the authority to say, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." (Rev. 3:21) God had already fulfilled his promise of glory to our Lord, and now he was prepared to carry out his part of the Divine arrangement by exalting his faithful church members to share that glory with him.

The Apostle Peter said, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (II Pet. 1:4) He was here speaking of the many precious assurances to Christ and the church that are recorded in the Old Testament. The prophets did not understand the significance of these promises. They perhaps saw them as pertaining to a glorious kingdom that would be established through the nation of Israel, and then to the blessings of earthly restitution.

When Peter wrote these words, the Old Testament was the only portion of the Scriptures then available. He had a blessed association with Jesus, and no doubt remembered some of the statements Jesus had made to his disciples pertaining to jointheirship with him in his kingdom. The Holy Spirit which came at Pentecost also helped him recall other promises Jesus had made. Isaiah's prophecy (53:12) also provided a firm foundation of faith and hope which enabled Peter to refer to these 'exceeding great and precious promises' by which we may become partakers of the Divine nature, and sharers in the glory of God.

SUFFERING, THEN GLORY

The disciples did not fully understand these promises of glory prior to Jesus' death and resurrection. They knew that he was the Messiah, and had come to earth by the authority of God. They were also learning that through him would come a dispensation of Divine glory in which, according to the various statements he had made to them, they expected to share.

When Jesus indicated to his disciples that he would be put to death, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, [pity thyself, *Marginal Translation*] Lord: this shall not be unto thee." (Matt. 16:22) Peter could not understand how an experience of suffering and death could be associated with the promises of glory which they were sure belonged to the Messiah. When Jesus was actually taken from them and crucified, they were bewildered. Some may have even concluded temporarily that Jesus may not have been the Messiah. They may have reasoned, how could the Messiah who is supported and strengthened by God be crucified by his enemies?

It was not until after the resurrection of Jesus that the disciples began to comprehend the significance of what had taken place. Two of his disciples were walking on the road to Emmaus, and "Their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"—Luke 24:31,32

Jesus had appeared to them as a stranger, but they were greatly encouraged and their hearts burned within them with joy. Jesus had pointed out to them the necessity for him to first suffer and die, and afterward to enter into his glory. The disciples had been given brief glimpses of a messianic kingdom of glory and the share which they hoped to enjoy in that kingdom with him, but they had not understood the message of the Old Testament which pointed out that before glory could come,

those who would partake of this wonderful hope must share in the experiences of sacrificial suffering and death.

The Apostle Peter seems to have grasped the meaning of these two important phases of the Divine plan. In his first epistle, he analyzes these thoughts, and reminds us that they constituted an important part of the entire Spirit-inspired testimony of the holy prophets. He also saw what Jesus revealed to his disciples at Pentecost, that those who follow in his footsteps are to share his glory with him. The Divine program for the Christ, was a program of suffering followed by glory, and it included the church as well.

The promises of glory to Jesus were not fulfilled on his behalf until he finished his sacrificial course in death. Neither can any member of the body of Christ expect to share in his glory until their sacrificial work is also completed in death. The Divine rule is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) In keeping with this Divine principle, it can be seen that there is no possibility of anyone reigning with Christ in any sense of the word while still in the flesh.

PETER'S TESTIMONY

In his first epistle, Peter wrote concerning the promises of glory, and shows that they are not fulfilled while the individual is in the flesh. This was true even with respect to Jesus. Concerning this he said, "Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."—I Pet. 1:21

The apostle again speaks of the hope of glory which we have because of association with Jesus in the Divine program of suffering and glory. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [purchased, *Marginal Translation*] people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (chap. 2:9) There is hope of glory, and this hope will be translated into reality in the first resurrection. It will then be only to those who have been faithful in participation in the suffering.

HEREUNTO WERE YE CALLED

Sacrificial suffering unto death is the first experience of those who are to be joint-heirs with Christ in his kingdom glory. "Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." (vs. 21) The nature of the suffering is referred to by the apostle, "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."—vs. 20

The Christian should expect to suffer for righteousness' sake. Peter says, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."—I Pet. 4:12,13

The prophets had prophesied concerning the sufferings of Christ, and if we are partakers of those sufferings because of our association with him, why

should we think it strange? Peter rejoices because this is evidence that our consecration and sacrifice is acceptable to God. It means that through the fiery trials which he permits to come, he is dealing with us, and preparing us for a position of glory with him in his kingdom.

Peter continues, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." (vs. 14, *New American Standard Bible*) These experiences are the testimony of God's Holy Spirit through his prophets, and apply to us.

The Apostle Paul also says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Rom. 8:16,17) How wonderful to think that we can come into such close contact and fellowship with God through his Spirit, simply upon the basis of our willingness to faithfully yield our wills to the doing of his will.

THAT I MAY WIN CHRIST

In order to have this hope of glory as an inspiration in our lives, it is necessary that we live close to our Lord. We must strive earnestly to do his will, and be determined to count all things as loss and dross, as compared to the attaining of that glorious hope set before us in the Gospel.

This is expressed by Paul when he says, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do

count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."—Phil. 3:8-11

The apostle further wrote, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) This joy was set before Jesus in the exceeding great and precious promises which God caused to be recorded for his encouragement. He no doubt thrilled at the prospect of returning to the heavenly courts, and of being once more in close association with his Heavenly Father. In addition to this, there was the prospect of being able to dispense blessings of life and happiness to all mankind. Jesus realized what joy it would be for all mankind when once the messianic kingdom was established and life would flow out to all the obedient.

THE JOY SET BEFORE US

A similar joy is set before all of Jesus' faithful followers. It is a joy in the prospect of close association with the Heavenly Father and with our beloved Lord. It is a joy of being partners in the outworking of the ultimate plan for the blessing of all mankind. What a wondrous hope of glory this is. Had the rich young ruler really comprehended the

full significance of what Jesus was saying to him, surely he would not have gone away sorrowful. The Scriptures say to those who are privileged to hear this call to glory, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."—Matt. 13:16 ■

"In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.

"Deliver me in thy righteousness, . . . For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.

"Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. . . . I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

—Psalm 71: 1,2,5,8,14