The Walk to Gethsemane

DURING HIS FINAL night on earth, beginning with the time Jesus had entered the upper room until he departed for Gethsemane, it must have been quite taxing for the Lord as he looked at the chosen twelve who were selected to carry the torch after his departure from the earth. Would they be fully ready to perform the great commission of preaching the kingdom and faithfully carrying out their vows of consecration?

Jesus had washed his disciples feet as an example of humility, love, and service. Since he was their Master it might have been assumed that one of them would have taken the initiative to wash his feet but, apparently, they were more consumed in thinking about their own importance and failed to utilize this opportunity to perform this service on their Lord's behalf.—John 14:4-12

Luke also describes some of the events that occurred in the upper room."There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. . . . For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that

sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:24,27) These two verses indicate there was a dispute among the disciples as well as Jesus' rebuke that greatness in God's sight is determined by a willingness to serve.

The Heavenly Father also had predicted betrayal by one of his own which must have been painful for the Master and shocking to the rest of the disciples, but it was needful for them to know this beforehand, thus adding to their sense of sobriety concerning their charge in being his witnesses following his death.—John 13:21-30

Finally, Peter's sense of self-assurance was addressed when Jesus declared that he would deny the Lord three times in the very near future. All of these events surely were cause for the Master's somber reflection as to how equipped his disciples would be in carrying out their Christian responsibilities once he was no longer present among them.—Luke 17:32-34

EXPERIENCES OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS

Jesus knew he would be crucified, and the nature of his words on the way to Gethsemane, in John 16 and 17, focused not upon himself but rather on his disciples who physically were with him, and those who would become his followers throughout this present Gospel Age. He was so solicitous of their welfare, and he foretold what some of their experiences would be in the future so as to prepare their hearts and to give assurance of the succor and provisions that would be made to guide and keep his people. "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out

of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you."—John 16:1-4

These experiences occurred very literally to many of his followers in the early church and also throughout the Gospel Age, although in our part of the world, at least right now, the persecutions may be more symbolic. For example, the concept of killing us might not necessarily be literal, but as Christians, our reputations could be destroyed and there might be much evil speaking to endure because our lifestyle is out of harmony with the world around us.

The Apostle Peter also foretold some of the experiences that would come upon the followers of Christ. "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. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." (I Pet. 4:12-16) In essence, this

is the same thing Jesus predicted and unless we are suffering for the wrong reason, such as being an evildoer or a busybody, we are to rejoice when we suffer as a Christian.

We might well imagine Christ's disciples previously feeling very thrilled to be associated with the Master. He drew huge crowds, performed great miracles, spake as never man spake; they were part of his inner circle. They were going to reign with him in his kingdom. They needed to be told, however, what the future would be like after his departure. The same lesson applies in our day. As Christians when we come to the point of devoting our lives to God and receive water baptism we may have a sense of euphoria because of the precious promises we claim, the hope of the high calling and a knowledge of God's plan. When we begin to be held in disesteem, undergo separation from family and friends who may consider us as being strange and reject us when we tell them about God's plan of salvation offered to all mankind, at that point we learn more clearly what following Christ implies.

A COMFORTER FOR JESUS' FOLLOWERS

Here is another prediction made by Jesus. "I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. . . . I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."—John 16:7,12,13

The Master had foretold that the Holy Spirit would come, guide, and instruct his people so they could function as his ambassadors in the world. When we consider that Jesus had been physically present with his disciples throughout his ministry, it would seem that nothing could have compared with that experience. Peter, James, John, and others had the actual experience of being with him while he was in the flesh before Pentecost. After that, however, they had the Holy Spirit; so from that point onward, their appreciation of the way of the cross grew because they could actually understand what Jesus' death meant. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (vs. 33) This predicted tribulation came upon the Lord's people and continues to do so, but it also has been accompanied by peace, and the inference is that if faithful, as Christ overcame the world, we will do likewise. As we examine our lives, none of us can say we have no problems. If we had expected to receive an earthly peace, we are bound to be disappointed. If we reflect upon some of the experiences of the early Christians as well as persecutions endured by believers throughout the Gospel Age, we know these 'more than overcomers' did not experience much peace of an earthly kind. It was necessary for them to look to Jesus in their difficulties for strength to endure, and to meditate upon his precious promises. This provided a sense of inner peace while the storms of life were raging all about them.

Have we experienced this promised peace that enables us to rejoice in the Lord and in the power

of his might no matter what? We need to understand and appreciate why being a follower of Christ does not result in smooth sailing into the kingdom on flowery beds of ease. Disappointments, unexpected trials, being misunderstood or having our motives questioned can all disrupt our peace, and if we don't keep in mind that the Lord permits adversity in our lives to prove and strengthen our faith, we will be in constant turmoil. As our Master overcame because of his faithfulness, let us bear in mind the assurance "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4

LEARNING TO BE CONTENT

If we lack inner peace we should examine ourselves to determine why we are not living up to our privileges. Are we focused upon developing spiritual fruitage as opposed to engaging in the works of the flesh? (Gal. 5:19-24) Are we careful not to forsake the assembling of ourselves with other brethren so as to obtain mutual strength and edification? (Heb. 10:25) Are our thoughts increasingly centered upon things which are true, pure, lovely, of good report and praiseworthy? (Phil. 4:8) Have we learned to be content in whatever state we are because we have fully acquiesced to the will of God? (vss. 11,12) If we have physical, financial, family, or other problems pressing upon us, do we believe we will never be tested beyond what we can bear but that by God's grace he will direct the issue for our highest spiritual welfare?—I Cor. 10:13

Prayer is an essential ingredient in a Christian's life to gain the strength needed to overcome adversity.

"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." (John 17:6) This portion of Jesus' prayer addresses the fact that his disciples had been instructed by the Master as to God's character, his attributes, and he affirms that it was the Heavenly Father who had given these chosen ones to our Savior. They had been separated from the mass of mankind and set apart for the Lord. Despite their human imperfections they believed and obeyed his teachings. The fact that this prayer is recorded seems to imply that it was made in audible tones to the Father but also heard by those who were with the Master. Unlike Jesus, we don't have the ability to prophesy in the sense of foretelling future events except to rehearse those matters that were written aforetime by the holy prophets, the apostles, and certainly the Lord. We do, however, have the capacity for prayer and it should be an integral part of our daily worship. Although Christians should pray for strength and guidance in their daily walk, there should also be a special remembrance given for other believers. We must make an effort to bear up the afflicted, isolated, or bereaved as well.

Additionally, we should not intentionally omit praying for any of our brethren because we had difficult experiences or misunderstandings with them. In fact, that is all the more reason to pray for them so that reconciliation might occur according to the Lord's will. "Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom

thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." (vs. 11) Here the Master's petition fully acknowledges he is leaving his disciples behind and he desires that God's protection and providence should be upon them and they would be kept together in unity of heart, mind, and spirit and also in the unity of the faith, and experience a sense of oneness such as existed between our Lord and his Father. We cannot imagine that Jesus ever prayed amiss, and thus this sense of oneness that is to exist among the brethren is not only a possibility but a requirement among all who are ultimately going to be part of the body of Christ. We should labor in any way possible to enhance our brethren's spiritual welfare.

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (vs. 17) The sanctification given by God is a process that is directly related to the believer's study of, and feeding upon, scriptural principles contained in the Bible. There the standards of holy, righteous conduct are set before the Christian's mind. Obedience to its teachings will separate the believer more and more from the spirit of the world, purify his mind, and promote increased spirituality. The Holy Spirit is used by the Heavenly Father to accomplish the work of sanctification in each believer. Not only does it enable him to comprehend God's Word, but it strengthens his desire to focus upon heavenly things and to lead a life of righteousness and self-denial. This is essential towards overcoming the influence of the world, the flesh, and the Adversary. The power of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian both "to will and to do" of God's "good pleasure."—Phil. 2:13

PRAYING FOR OUR BRETHREN

How can we aid our brethren with their sanctification? We likewise must pray for our brethren to be faithful. The fervent effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Additionally, we can support them in their Christian endeavors wherever possible. We should meet together so that we can encourage one another. Sometimes testifying about one's experiences can help other brethren find possible solutions that have worked in addressing some of life's difficulties. If we can appreciate the fact that we have fellow body members who have the same goal as ourselves we can be a blessing one to the other. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."—John 17:20-23

In our imperfect state, it is not possible for us to fully comprehend the Lord's ways. We believe them in faith as revealed in God's Word and ask for more of the Holy Spirit so that our appreciation and conviction regarding these matters can deepen. Can we grasp the fact that the Heavenly Father could love us so dearly because we are willing to be transformed into the image of his dear Son? Perhaps it is a little easier to understand that God would love Christ exceedingly because he was always so obedient, and

in coming to earth to redeem mankind, he willingly and rejoicingly bore every test he experienced. But what about ourselves? Could the Father really love us as he loved his only begotten Son? When we see that we are called to be a part of Christ's body, would the Father therefore have less love for us than his Son? Human reasoning might suggest, "yes" but God's Word is true and the promise for us as overcomers is that the Father loves us as he loves Christ. We may not deserve it, but such is the depth of the Father's love which takes our righteous intentions for the deed, even when we come far short of perfection.

What about Jesus? He promised to the overcomers that he would grant that they should sit with him on his throne even as he overcame and was permitted to sit with the Father on his throne. (Rev. 3:21) What humility on the Master's part. He did not say I don't want the church to share with me in this glory for after all I am the Head. Not at all. His love is so intense for his bride that he will share with us all the glory and blessings of his exalted station if we are faithful to him.

One of the evidences that we have passed from death unto life is that we love the brethren. Additionally, as Christ laid down his life for us, we should lay down our lives for the brethren. In other words, we should do whatever we can to help them make their calling and election sure and, when the church is complete, earth's weary night will end and the kingdom of righteousness will be ushered in to bless the human family.—I John 3:14,16; Rev. 21:1-4

The Master's experiences during his last night on earth are recorded to encourage believers in their

Christian walk throughout this Gospel Age. His con-cerns were not for himself but for the twelve who were to be his special ambassadors in the earth, and for those who would hearken unto their teach-ings after he had returned to heaven victorious to be with his Father. He left us a legacy of precious promises and comfort to assist each of us, if we would follow in his footsteps. These words, if taken to heart, will result in our being faithful unto death and ultimate participants in his glory.—II Pet. 1:4,10,11 ■