

THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM

- MATTHEW 11:1-11. - APRIL 17. -

Golden Text: – "But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." – John 5:36.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, the Master declared, was a prophet; yea, more than a prophet, for of him it was written, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." (V. 10.) This noble character was God's chosen servant for heralding the Messiah to Israel. His message to the people had been "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; repent and believe the good news." Many had responded and had been baptized, symbolically washing themselves from sin and giving fresh adherence to the Law and care in its observance. Prophetically John had declared that stirring times were ahead of the nation; that the Messiah was about to make a separation between the true wheat and the chaff class; that he would gather the wheat into his barn, but would burn up the chaff in unquenchable fire. The wheat in this prophecy signified "the holy," "the righteous," who, as a result of following Messiah, would be exalted or glorified. This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost and subsequently, when the "Israelites indeed" were accepted of God as sons on the spirit plane – begotten of the holy Spirit – as members of the Body of Christ, members of the Kingdom class – then in embryo, but, later on, by resurrection power, to be ushered into heavenly glory and dominion. The remainder of the nation, merely nominally God's people, had merely the outward form, as chaff. For such, the Prophet John declared a time of trouble at hand, symbolically represented by a furnace of fire, which would consume them as people. As the forepart of this prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, it reached

final accomplishment thirty-seven years later, when the entire nation collapsed, ceasing its national existence, which it has never since re-attained.

JOHN IN PRISON DOUBTED

But instead of Jesus becoming a great king after the manner of John's expectation, to reward his faithful and destroy the impious, John beheld, What? – Himself cast into prison and Jesus surrounded by a paltry few – barred from the vicinity of Jerusalem because the Jews sought to kill him, and doing most of his preaching in "Galilee of the nations," amongst those who made less religious profession and amongst whom were few scribes or Pharisees or Doctors of the Law. Moreover, Jesus had not made any attempt to deliver his forerunner from prison, although he continually manifested great power in the healing of diseases and the casting out of devils. *What could it all mean?* was John's query. Had he been mistaken?

Surely he was not mistaken in supposing that he had God's testimony to Jesus at the time of his baptism; as he had declared, "This is he!" But what he? Was he merely another prophet still greater than himself preceding the still greater and true Messiah? Thus wondering, he sent messengers to inquire of Jesus, saying, "Art thou he that should come (the Messiah), or look we for another?" – Are we to look behind you for a still greater through whom God will fulfill his prophecy?

PROOFS OF JESUS' MINISTRY

In answer to the query our Lord sent word to John particularly of the work he was doing – healing the sick, casting out devils and preaching the good tidings of God's **[R4595 : page 122]** grace to the poor. And he added, Tell John not to get offended; not to allow his faith to stumble in respect to me. Otherwise he will lose a great blessing.

The Master improved the opportunity to discuss John's case, who he was, etc., with the multitude. For the fame of John's preaching had spread throughout the land and many from all parts went to hear him. What did they find him? Merely a reed shaken by the wind, pliable to those who would influence him? Oh, no! They found him a rugged character, strong, independent in the advocacy of the Truth, in the bearing of his message. Did they find him clothed in soft raiment and giving evidences of being related to the great, the wealthy, the noble of the time? No, he was simply clad, lived in seclusion, and was faithful and earnest in the delivery of his message to all who would hear. But if they went out expecting to hear a prophet they were not disappointed, for John was more than a prophet. As another account renders this, "Among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." – Luke 7:28.

THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM GREATER THAN JOHN THE BAPTIST

These words by our Lord have caused much perplexity amongst Christian people, who have failed to discern the necessity of "rightly dividing the Word of Truth." (2 Tim. 2:15.) The matter is simple enough when we remember that John was the last of the faithful under the Jewish dispensation. He was not invited to become one of the disciples of Christ, nor one of the Apostles, neither did he live until Pentecost to share in the blessings there poured upon the faithful. He belongs to a class described by St. Paul in Hebrews 11:38-40. He was in a class with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, of whom the Apostle says, "They without us shall not be made perfect" [**R4595 : page 123**] – "*God having provided some better thing for us*" – the Gospel Church, the Body of Christ, the Bride class – than for them. – Heb. 11:40.

The Great Teacher continually referred to the Kingdom in all of his discourses and in the sample prayers which he set forth. This Kingdom is to come into power at the close of this Age and under it, as the Millennial Kingdom, the whole world will be subjected to Divine Law for their deliverance from sin and death, if they will, into righteousness of life. The class that will compose that Kingdom are spoken of in the present time as a Royal Priesthood in a prospective sense. They are in the School of Christ for preparation for the Kingdom. Those faithful will make their calling and election sure to places in that Kingdom and sit with the Master on his Throne, judging, blessing and uplifting mankind. How wonderful a blessing is ours! We cannot be so great as our Lord, the Head, and his Apostles, his most honored members, but if faithful in that which is least, our glorious reward will be exceedingly high – "far above angels and principalities and powers and every name that is named." – Eph. 1:21.

