

"LEAST IN THE KINGDOM"

– MATTHEW 11:2-19. – JUNE 16. –

"Amongst them that are born of women there is none greater than John; yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he."

– Luke 7:28.

IT WOULD BE difficult to express in words a higher tribute to John the Baptist than Jesus paid him in our text. Again He said, "There hath not risen a greater Prophet than John the Baptist." If then John was so holy a man, so great a man from the Divine standpoint, why did our Lord in this text declare that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven would be greater than John? This text has puzzled Bible exponents for many a day. It has seemed to many to be contradictory.

But just as soon as we turn on the light contained in that word "Kingdom," the entire subject becomes clear. God had promised a Messianic Kingdom, and Jesus had come that He might be the Head of that Kingdom. The steps leading to the Kingdom honors and glories were steps of obedience to God, even unto death, and these steps Jesus had begun to take. On the cross He declared, "It is finished." He had finished the work of proving Himself loyal to God and to the Truth even unto death on the cross.

Jesus thus became the Great Conqueror, the great High Priest, the great King of Glory, being exalted to the Heavenly state in His resurrection. But, as the Great King, He was to have associated with Him in His Throne, His Bride class. As the Great Priest, He was to have an under-priesthood, a "Royal Priesthood." As the Great Judge of the world, He was to have associates; as St. Paul declares, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" – I Cor. 6:2.

In the Divine Plan this company of associates with Jesus in His glorious Kingdom were as much foreknown and foreordained as was

He and His share in the Kingdom. As it was necessary for Him to undergo trials and testings of loyalty unto death, so it must be with the class called to be His associates – "He was tempted in all points like as *we* are." Thus His Message is, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I overcame and am set down with My Father in His Throne." These would be *followers* in His footsteps, *none could precede* Him. *His* work was necessary *first*, to open up for His followers a new and living way, through the veil – that is to say, through His flesh – through His sacrifice.

"SOME BETTER THING FOR US"

While about five hundred brethren became Jesus' consecrated followers during His earthly ministry, they were not then accepted of the Father *as sons*, and not begotten of the Holy Spirit until Pentecost. God would not recognize any as sons until Jesus had finished His sacrifice, and, as the great Advocate, "Appeared in the presence of God for *us*" – as *our* Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. John did not belong to this class, just as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the Prophets did not belong to it. In God's providence their reward will be different from that of the Church – theirs will be an earthly reward. They will be resurrected to human perfection. They will have to do with the human phase of the Kingdom, which amongst men will represent Messiah and the Church, who will be spirit beings, but invisible to men, and whose dealings with mankind will be through those noble characters, the Ancient Worthies.

We are not to infer that those glorious characters mentioned in the Scriptures who lived before Christ's time were ignoble or less faithful than the Gospel Church, but merely that God promised them the earthly perfection, while He has promised the Bride of Christ the heavenly perfection. They will not, like the remainder of mankind, come forth to imperfection, to attain perfection gradually during the thousand years of Messiah's reign; the record is that they will come forth as perfect human beings. That will be the reward of their

faithfulness. St. Paul explains the entire matter in Hebrews, the 11th chapter. He tells of the faith and heroism of those Ancient Worthies and that "they had this testimony, that they pleased God." There will be no necessity for testing them in the future. Their acceptance with God is already proven and declared.

Nevertheless, in God's order the earthly Kingdom and restitution blessings for the world cannot begin until the Kingdom class, Christ and the Church, shall first be completed. Thus the Apostle declares, "All these died in faith, not having received the (earthly) things promised to them, God having provided some better thing for us (the Church), that they, without us, should not be made perfect." The glorification of the Church, her resurrection to perfection, must first be accomplished before the blessings through them can proceed to the natural seed of Abraham, and then through Israel to all nations. – Heb. 11:38-40.

NOT THE BRIDE BUT THE FRIEND

John the Baptist seemed to either comprehend the situation, or else he spoke the truth by prophecy when he declared, "He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom, hearing His voice, rejoiceth greatly. This my joy therefore is fulfilled." He perceived that in God's providence he had a very honorable and blessed station and work to accomplish, but he was to be neither the Bridegroom nor a member of the Bride class.

This does not imply that John was disappointed at the time, nor that he and the other Ancient Worthies will be disappointed when they come forth in the resurrection to find a Bride class selected to a higher place than theirs. On the contrary, their cup of blessing being full, and never having been begotten of the Holy Spirit to a spirit nature, they will not be able to comprehend or appreciate any blessings higher than their own. Just, for instance, as a fish in the water, seeing a bird flying in the air, would not be jealous of the bird and its greater freedom, but, on the contrary, would be better satisfied in the water, its natural

element, so all natural men, not begotten of the Holy Spirit, will appreciate more the earthly blessings which Divine providence has provided for them.

In this very lesson Jesus intimates all the above, saying, "The Law and the Prophets were until John." He was the last of the Prophets. He introduced Jesus, the Head of the Kingdom class. Jesus further declared, "If ye are willing to receive it, this is Elias which was to come." That is to say, Those of you who are able to appreciate the matter may understand that John the Baptist did a work which was in full accord with the prophecy which declared that Elijah must first come and do a reformatory work before Messiah would come.

CURIOSITY IS NOT RELIGION

Addressing the multitudes the Great Teacher inquired, Why did you go out to the wilderness to see John? Was **[R5031 : page 167]** it to hear his message? Was it because God spoke through him as a Prophet as the wind makes music through the reeds? Or did you go out to see a man in fine clothing and of kingly state?

What really drew to the wilderness to John's teaching was that he was God's Prophet; as it is written, "Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare the way before Thee." This preparation for Jesus John made with the Jewish nation. His message was that the Kingdom of Heaven was about to be offered to them, and that only the holy would be ready to receive it.

But neither John nor his hearers fully realized in what way the Kingdom would be offered to the people, namely, that it would be an offer, first, of a place or share in the Kingdom, and that the terms would be full consecration to the Lord, to walk "the narrow way." Jesus again testified, "If ye had received John ye would have received Me."

In other words, all who received John's message were such as were in heart condition to receive Jesus; and the same spirit of indifference which permitted Herod to imprison John and to finally behead him marked the Jewish leaders and their unbelief. John as a Prophet was abstemious to the extreme, and they said, "He hath a devil." Jesus presented Himself less peculiarly, eating and drinking and being clothed as other people, and of Him they said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Thus was it demonstrated that the fault was not in the manifestation of God's providence, but in the hearts of the majority of the Jews.

