

VICTORIOUS CHRIST HEADS PROCESSION

**"When He ascended up on high He led a multitude of captives."
– Eph. 4:8.**

THIS GRAND EXPRESSION respecting the glorious outcome of the Savior's work is quoted by the Apostle Paul from the Psalms. (68:18.) The figure thus thrust before our mental eye is that of a great Conqueror whose victory is being heralded. With the Romans we know that it was a custom that generals returning from various wars were granted what were termed "Triumphs" – that is to say, triumphal processions, that the people might have tangible evidence of their victories.

Thus, for instance, Titus, returning from the war upon the Jews in A.D. 70, brought with him certain notable persons and the Golden Candlestick from the Temple, and these were displayed to the eyes of the people following the conqueror. They were subsequently sculptured on the Arch of Titus, still standing in Rome. And evidently the custom was still older than the days of the Romans, since it was so prophetically set forth by the Prophet David.

Let us permit our mental eye to feast upon the scene presented in our text. Jesus, in fulfilment of the Divine Program, had left the heavenly condition and descended to earth, taking a bondman's form or nature in order "that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9); in order that He might rescue Adam and his race from the dying and death condition in which they were – under Divine sentence and under the power of Satan.

Therefore the Redeemer counted not His life precious to Him, but freely delivered Himself up for our offenses and died, "the Just for the unjust," that He might bring mankind back into harmony with God. His humiliation ended in death, but His triumph began when, as is recorded, God raised Him from the dead by His own power, and set

him at the right hand of His own Majesty – "far above angels, principalities and powers and every name that is named, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." [R5066 : page 227]

HE THAT ASCENDED FIRST DESCENDED

The prophecy says nothing about our Lord's descending from the heavenly glory to the earthly nature, but St. Paul supplies this feature saying, "He that ascended, what is it but that He first descended, into the lower condition of the earth?" (Verse 9.) Thus the Apostle asserts that He that descended is He that ascended above all heights, that all things may be fulfilled through Him.

An important thought here noted is that our Lord not only left the heavenly glory, but that He returned to a still more excellent glory – He did not suffer the disastrous loss of the heavenly nature as a result of His obedience in taking the human nature. As He left the heavenly nature to take the human, so in returning He left the human nature to ascend again to that which He had before, with the additional glory of the divine nature.

LEADING FORTH THE CAPTIVES

With most of the conquerors in olden times the captives were made slaves. Not so, however, will be the result of Jesus' victory. He leads forth to liberty and eternal life those who have been slaves of sin and death. His train of captives is a long one indeed; the procession has already occupied *eighteen centuries*, and is yet to be the great work of the *thousand years* of the Messianic reign!

First of all in the procession are the saints – "the Church of the First-born, whose names are written in Heaven." In the forefront of them we see the twelve Apostles, St. Paul taking the place of Judas. The Apostles are to be Kings who are to reign with Christ in preeminent positions; but following them are some others of the saintly company of Kings – in all a "little flock."

Then will come a company, more numerous, but less heroic – "a great multitude," uncrowned, but with "palm branches," not antitypical Priests, but antitypical Levites, associates and servants of the Royal Priesthood, the Bride. Then will follow (Heb. 11:38-40) other faithful ones of the past, the Ancient Worthies. The Prophet speaks also of the "rebellious house." The classes previously specified were not rebellious, but gladly and willingly forsook all to do the will of the Father and to attain the liberty of sons of God, as the first-fruits of the triumph of the Lamb.

But during the thousand years of Christ's reign He will lead forth the "rebellious house" – the world of mankind – not all of them, we may be sure, for some, the Scriptures positively declare, will die the Second Death, because, after realizing their deliverance, they will love sin and will therefore be destroyed as enemies of righteousness. But it is a blessed thought that many of those who are now aliens, strangers and foreigners from God through wicked works, are in this condition of opposition, not willingly, not intelligently, but by reason of the ignorance and weaknesses which came to them by heredity, under the reign of sin and death.

It is to be a distinct feature of the great Triumph of Immanuel that every eye shall be opened and every ear unstopped, that "the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth," during His glorious reign of righteousness. Are we not distinctly told of the time that will follow, in which all the willing and obedient shall receive the Holy Spirit, which then will be poured out "upon all flesh" even as now, during this Gospel Age, it is poured out upon God's "servants and handmaidens" only? – Joel 2:28.

Oh, that will be a glorious Triumph for the great Redeemer! In the language of the Bible, "He shall see the fruitage of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." (Isa. 53:11.) What a glorious fruitage! – not only His own exaltation – not only the exaltation of His faithful Bride class, and the additional exaltation of "the virgins, her

companions, which follow her," and the exaltation of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the Prophets, but finally the deliverance to human perfection of all the groaning creation willing to accept the same upon the Divine terms of loyalty to God and to the principles of His Government, as these shall be made known to them.

"HE GAVE GIFTS UNTO MEN"

It was the custom in olden times that a king coming into authority and power should give gifts according to His wealth. Governors and princes would be needed and he would dispense the honors of these offices to those found [R5067 : page 227] faithful in his service, loyal in the defense of His cause. So, in this prophetic reference to our Lord's ascension, it is declared not only that He would lead forth a multitude of captives, granting them freedom, liberty, blessings, but also that He would confer certain gifts.

We might have spent valuable time guessing the nature of these gifts which the great Redeemer would dispense, but such a waste of time is unnecessary, since the Apostle proceeds to explain the matter and tells us what gifts are meant. He says, "And He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

There is an astounding thought connected with this statement – that the Apostles were not self-appointed, and that they had no successors, and that the work of evangelizing, or making known the "good tidings," and the pastoral work and the teaching work amongst believers, are all under the supervision of the Head of the Church, the great Victor, who redeemed us with His blood, and who proposes, first, to lead forth a Bride class, and subsequently all the willing and obedient.

It behooves us to notice that the Apostle does not intimate that Jesus gave to some Methodism, to others Presbyterianism, and others Roman Catholicism, etc. No, when we held such thoughts it was

because of more or less misunderstanding – because we failed to see first that there is but the "one Church of the Living God, whose names are written in heaven," and second, that that one Church is not any of the various sects and parties, but includes the saintly in all of these; "the Lord knoweth them that are His."

NOT GIVEN TO CONVERT THE WORLD

Noting carefully the Apostle's argument in connection with our text, we perceive that the Master did not give these gifts for the conversion of the world. He does specify, however, what they were for, namely, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ" – the Church, the Bride class. Is it supposable that the Apostle erred in this statement and that the fact is the reverse – that these gifts were provided for the conversion of the world, and that the Apostle thoroughly misunderstood the matter and supposed that they were given for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the Body of Christ? No! We are to be taught by the Apostle and may be sure that there is no mistake, no error in his statement.

Notice the force of the expression, "the perfecting of the saints." It is not sufficient that believers have a little knowledge, a little faith, and a measure of sanctification or devotion to the Lord, for after they have received and attained all of these things they still need the instruction of the Apostles and ministers, pastors and teachers, provided by the great Head of the Church for their perfecting. Ah! there is a force and depth of meaning in that word *perfecting*. We remember that of our Head it is written, "Being made perfect through suffering, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey **[R5067 : page 228]** Him." So His followers are made perfect through suffering.

The Master's perfecting, indeed, was a little different from ours, and yet there is a similarity between the two. He was perfect before He humbled Himself; He was still perfect as the Man Christ Jesus,

who gave Himself; but as a result of His consecration He received a begetting of the Holy Spirit to the divine nature, and His development as a New Creature required that He faithfully carry out His vow, or covenant of sacrifice, in the doing of the will of the Heavenly Father. By such faithfulness He perfected Himself on the divine plane – that is, He proved Himself worthy according to the covenant – "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory, honor, dominion and power." – Rev. 5:12.

Similarly the followers of Jesus are to be sharers with Him in the sufferings of this present time and in the glories which shall follow, for "If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him." (2 Tim. 2:12.) Although we are imperfect in the flesh, while He was perfect, yet the robe of His righteousness, the merit of His sacrifice, covers all of our blemishes and makes us, as His footstep followers, holy and acceptable before the Father, as joint-sacrificers with Jesus.

The begetting of the Holy Spirit starts us in the life divine. We are not to be perfected in the flesh, but in the spirit, and our perfection and acceptance with the Father will be demonstrated by our loyalty of heart and the fulness and thoroughness with which we submit our all to the Divine will and seek to glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are His. (I Cor. 6:20.) Our justification comes to us as a reward of faith, regardless of works, but our glorification will follow as a reward for faithfulness.

THESE GIFTS ARE LASTING

Not merely for a few days or years were these gifts to the Church provided; on the contrary, they were to endure throughout this entire Age, until the Church perfected shall pass beyond the veil and be forever with her Redeemer, to share His glory, honor and immortality. The Lord from time to time has raised up evangelists, pastors and teachers for this glorious service of preparing the "chaste virgin," the Church, to be the Bride in glory. But the Apostolic office, as represented in The Twelve specially provided by the Father, has

continued and needs no replenishment. We still have their instructions as fully as the early Church, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work." – 2 Tim. 3:16,17.

That the Apostle did not understand the matter to be merely for a day, but throughout this Age, until the completion of the Church, is clearly evidenced by his statement, namely, that all these gifts were for the edification of the Body of Christ and the perfecting of the saints to the last – "until we all come to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This is a wonderful statement, however we view it. Shall we say that it applies to each individual member of the Church of Christ, and that each individual must come into that full unity of faith, and that full knowledge of the Son of God, and the perfection of manhood in Christ, and to a developed stature of maturity in Christ? Or shall we understand the meaning to be, until the entire Church of Christ shall have reached a full knowledge and shall, as a whole, have come to the condition of a perfect Man, of which Christ is the Head and we are the members – to the full development or stature of the Anointed, the Messiah, Head and members? We believe that the latter is the Apostle's thought.

Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that the selection of these members all the way down the Age must have been along the lines here indicated. Individually, one partially developed would not be fitted for the Kingdom. One not in the unity of the faith would not be suitable. One not developed to the proper measure or stature as a Christian would not be suitable. Nothing is more plain than that the individual Christian needs a great deal of instruction, edification, building up in the holy faith, testing, proving, chiseling, polishing, fitting, preparing before he shall be ready for a place in the Kingdom.

GOD'S PEOPLE NO LONGER NEED BE MISLED

This thought is confirmed by the succeeding verses, in which the Apostle tells us that by the assistance of these, the Divinely provided gifts, teachers, etc., God's people need no longer, like children, to be tossed to and fro, and be misled by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness of those who would deceive. On the contrary, being sincere, and speaking the truth in love, they are to grow up into membership in the Anointed One in all things – coming fully and completely into fellowship and obedience, under the Head, even Christ. – Verses 14,15.

Proceeding, the Apostle tells us that all who are recognized as members of the Body of Christ must be properly joined to the Head – by a proper compact, or covenant, intelligently made and fully intended. This union must be compacted, and it requires the entire Gospel Age to effect this development and compacting as members, that the whole Body of the Anointed may be one – symmetrical, beautiful, co-operative – making increase in its members and edifying itself in love – growing in grace and in knowledge and in character-likeness to the Head. – V. 16.

In conclusion, then, the Captain of our Salvation has gone before, He has accepted us as His joint-heirs, and we are following on, blest by the gifts which He dispensed when He ascended up on high; and we, in turn, will be His gifts to the world of mankind. When as Priests and Kings we shall be associated with our Lord, we shall bless all the families of the earth with a glorious opportunity of knowledge and obedience, that they may, if they will, attain life everlasting, "the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." – Rom. 6:23.

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