

the council-scene . . . we have a vivid and striking incident, agreeing with the general type of Roman procedure, and yet giving us information about life on board a Government transport such as we could not find in any other part of ancient literature".⁷ This is yet another tribute

by a scholar to the unique character of Luke's narrative.

(To be continued)

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Our hope: kings and priests with Christ

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Are we right to serve God because we hope for places in the Kingdom? The Scriptural answer is that we should make it our priority to attain to positions as kings and priests.

"OHOW RICH THE PROMISE"! Yes, the hope of eternal glory is rich; difficult to grasp. It is so great that we can almost minimise the vastness of this promised future glory. Some brothers and sisters have suggested that it is selfish to look for the reward. Yet hope is one of the three principle virtues of the New Testament, and, although love is undoubtedly the greatest, both faith and hope have a role.

God the rewarder

A brother giving a Sunday night lecture asked the gathering whether they would still serve God even if there was no hope of eternal life. He did not insist on an answer from the audience, but suggested that we should worship God irrespective of any reward, just because He is God. However, this is not what our Father has set in place.¹ Faith, the Hebrews were told, is to believe that there is a God, and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). So belief in a future reward is an integral element of faith; just as believing in God's very existence and knowing His character is an essential element of faith.

We need to be careful in suggesting that we would worship God even if there was no reward. If there was no reward, no Kingdom, no glory, we would be worshipping a different God in a different universe. Such a hypothesis is beyond us, for our God has called us to His Kingdom and glory. Even Jesus was sustained by the joy set before him.

A faith motivated by hope need not be selfish. We want to be there to share Christ's glory, to

praise him and our Father eternally. We want to be there to be given charge over two cities and work with Christ to bring the world under God's control. We want to be there to help the mortals of the world come to know

God and teach them to love Him. This is not a Kingdom for me, but God's Kingdom for God's glory.

A Sunday School teacher used to tell our class that brethren who stood on the platform and spoke of the coming Kingdom were erring. Such attention to the future, since some of it was hazy detail, was unhelpful, she asserted. Sadly, she is no longer in Christ, having loved the things of this age. The brethren whom she thought to be doing wrong still seem to be clinging onto Christ, years later. How simple is the wisdom of the Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint" (29:18, RV)!

Kings and priests

Our calling is high (Phil. 3:14), or, more accurately, it is an "upward call" (NAS). This calling is seen in the glorious song that the redeemed saints, symbolised by the twenty-four elders, sing to Christ: "Thou . . . hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9,10).

Some have suggested that the idea of being called to be kings is too high a calling. It is claimed that we should follow the more modern texts, which instead of the Greek word for kings (Gk. *basileus*) have the word for kingdom (*basileia*). So

1. This is not to deny that the book of Job illustrates the importance of not serving God for present satisfaction or gain. However, this does not contradict the Scriptural teaching that God does want us to long for His Kingdom and look for something better than this life.

it is suggested that Christ calls us to be priests, a kingdom of priests. However, even if the word were 'kingdom' we would need to read it as "a kingdom and priests". Christ is calling us to a very high calling—to be kings with him—for the saints sing, "we shall reign" (Rev. 5:10).

What an incomparable honour the Father will give us! There will be a Kingdom, and we shall reign and exercise the privilege of priests. The joint role of the saints as kings and priests is taught in other places in Revelation: "but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (20:6). John on Patmos was suffering great tribulation from the rulers of his day; but joy was ahead for him. He would be given the position of a wise king ruling justly over men. Although the idea of being king-priests may seem beyond us, we can have no doubt that this is what God has called us to.

Melchizedek—the pattern of king-priests

Jesus Christ has been made "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:4). We know that Melchizedek was both king of Salem and the priest of the most high God (Heb. 7:1). Of necessity, an order of priests requires many priests, all of whom in this case are kings as well. So Christ being High Priest of this order provides for us a promise of being a priest, a king-priest like him, under the great wisdom of his authority.

Paul describes him as a "forerunner" of this order, who has clearly established the path for many others to follow. This promise was clearly communicated by Christ in the Apocalypse. He told the Laodiceans that if they overcame they would share his kingship when he sits upon his throne (Rev. 3:21), just as God has given His Son the privilege of sharing His throne.

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised his faithful apostles a share in his Kingdom, when each one will have a throne and reign: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:29,30). Their faithfulness in trial was preparing them to share his authority in the Kingdom of God. So, just as Christ has a throne, each of his faithful apostles will have a throne (Mt. 19:28).

Jesus was not introducing a new thought. The prophet Daniel had said that, when the dreadful fourth beast is destroyed, "the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the

kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever" (7:18). The "basest" of men (4:17) will share his authority with many others. However, Christ's supremacy is unquestioned, for, as Isaiah puts it, "a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (32:1).

Preparation to be kings and priests

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the present state in which they found themselves. Instead of being nobodies they were enjoying their kingdom already: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor. 4:8). Paul speaks of their present rulership. Yes indeed, they would reign, but the Kingdom was not to be set up in the first century, and Paul wanted to reign with them. So their desire to reign as kings was not wrong; it was just that they had to wait.

Paul taught that the path to kingship was through suffering: "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). It is suffering that makes us fit for elevation, for it is through suffering that we are humbled and learn the qualities of kings and priests. Of course, none will pretend that the power is of them. The Kingdom is God's and the glory is His, but nevertheless our Father has called us to share it: "walk worthy of God, Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12).

The qualities required

Christ wants us to prepare ourselves to be Melchizedek priests, to be part of that order of priests that shall reign on the earth. So we should remind ourselves of the qualities he is looking for in us.

As priests he desires in us:

- lips that teach knowledge (Mal. 2:7)
- minds that are holiness to Yahweh
- mercy and faithfulness (Heb. 2:17)
- sympathy with those that fail (4:15,16).

As future kings he is looking for:

- just men, who rule in the fear of the Lord, like himself (2 Sam. 23:3)
- right judgement of situations (1 Cor. 6:5)
- firmness in the Divine law.

If we can humbly develop these qualities, and overcome, we have Christ's promise that we will sit down with him in his throne, and bring the nations to subjection unto him. What joy awaits us!