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FOR THE JOY THAT LAY AHEAD

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are told the Lord Jesus endured the Cross for the sake of the joy that awaited Him. And what was that Joy?

The joy of honouring the Father and giving Him the pleasure of seeing His Holy Law fulfilled. The joy of bringing to completion what was ordained before the foundation of the world – the redemption of a great multitude from every nation, who will worship and glorify God for ever.

The joy of being made Head of the Church, “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John is given a stunning vision of the risen Lord Jesus. Here is part of what he saw:

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.

(Revelation 1:12-14)

The image of Jesus clothed in a long robe with a golden sash and moving among seven golden lampstands is that of a priest engaged in service in the Temple. The lampstands we are told represent the Seven Churches.

What the Lord wants us to see here is that Christ the great High Priest is always active and present with His People.

Another joy set before Jesus was the joy of being made King of the Universe. Earlier in that same chapter of Revelation, He is given the title, "ruler of the kings of the earth." Towards the end of Revelation, it is these kings of the earth who align themselves with the Beast to oppose God and His chosen ones.

In light of this, this title designated to Jesus is especially important. It means everyone and everything is under the absolute and sovereign control of God's Anointed!

This ties in with what we read in Ephesians, that Jesus was made, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named." All these, and much more, was what sustained our Saviour under all He had to endure.

It is interesting that the Suffering Servant prophecy of Isaiah begins and ends with a description of the exaltation and glory of the Righteous Servant.

However, in between the mountain tops of glory, lay the deep valley of shame and suffering. This will be the subject of our next chapter.

WHEN THE SORROWS BEGAN

The chapter from Isaiah we have been speaking about opens with the words, "Behold my Servant." The word "behold" is always used in Scripture to encourage the reader's utmost attention.

"Consider Him who endured such hostility against Himself from sinners." Those are the words from the author of the Book of Hebrews. And at the Last Supper Jesus Himself gave a similar command with "do this in remembrance of me."

That these Scriptures are not exclusively a reference to the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life, or even to His Public Ministry, is very obvious. In this chapter of Isaiah, the Prophet is speaking of Messiah's whole life history and he explicitly describes Him as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering."

Elsewhere in the Book of Hebrews we are told Jesus suffered when tempted and that He learned obedience through what He suffered, implying a long process. This becomes even clearer upon more attentive study of the Gospel narratives themselves.

What the Gospels Say

We read how the Lord worked very hard, even to the point of being weary and completely exhausted at times. We see a situation where, being too worn out to reach the boat Himself, His Disciples carried him "even as he was" and laid Him down near the helm to sleep.

And if Jesus' condescending participation in human nature was not enough, He stooped even lower by becoming a Nobody among men, so that nobody would be excluded from finding comfort in Him.

We are told the Lord often had nowhere to lay His head and that He depended upon the ministry of a few women among His company of acquaintances to sustain Him. And how did the majority of those He came to help respond to His hard work and mission of love?

When Jesus went back to His hometown of Nazareth and revealed the light-hearted youth they had grown up with was the Promised Messiah, they treated Him with cold rejection and unbelief.

Worse than this, when He went on to teach that God is no respecter of persons, they dragged Him from their synagogue and tried to throw Him off a cliff!

Although their ingratitude and unbelief grieved the Lord, it could not stop Him; He continued to go about declaring the Good News, raising the dead, healing the sick, delivering the captives, deeds for which they tried to stone Him to death on several occasions.

We read that when their plans to take Jesus' life failed, they resorted to slander, blasphemy and ridicule. They attributed His deliverances to the power of Beelzebub. They labelled Him a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners, when in reality He was making Himself "a slave to all" so that He "might win more of them."

When for their own good He went below the surface and exposed their hidden sin, they said He had a devil, and was mad, to discredit Him.

They twisted and misrepresented everything the Lord said and used it against Him before the Roman authorities. Now, this all refers to Jesus' Public Ministry, what about the silent years?

A Perfect Illustration

Concerning the first thirty years of Jesus' life on Earth after His birth the Gospel narratives say very little following the story of the Boy Jesus in the Temple.

We are told only that Jesus grew and became strong; filled with wisdom, and that He found favour with God and man. After that we are left to wonder what life may have been like for Him. An experience a friend of mine shared greatly increased my understanding.

Giovanna decided to participate in a one-day awareness activity for the blind. The goal was to experience the difficulties blind people face in normal daily activities that many of us take for granted.

Participants were greeted in the morning at the school, and after going over the itinerary, were blindfolded for the rest of the day until evening.

Giovanna recalled that at times it was so intense and frustrating that she was very tempted to say "enough," and remove those self-imposed limitations. But if she had done that, even near the end of the day, the whole experiment would have been wasted!

Remember, this lasted just one day! Imagine the Lord, year after year of it! But for the sake of His Elect He pressed on, until the Day of His Baptism.

This was the last act of Jesus' Private Life and the first that marked the beginning of His Public Mission, where, as we have just seen, those woes began to multiply.

Why that Title?

We will conclude this chapter with another very important point that is sometimes missed, and that much of our so-called sacred art does little to remedy.

Isaiah does not call the Messiah "man of sorrows" because He went around looking dismal. Have you ever met a Spirit-filled person like that? Obviously not! And remember Jesus had the Spirit without measure! Moreover, the Lord condemned such behaviour.

Neither was Jesus named so because of the diverse assaults and reproaches His opponents constantly hurled against Him. No, His sorrows were always for the damage they were doing to their own souls in letting such sacrifice go to waste!!

YOU CAN'T DO THIS IN HEAVEN

Mediating on Christ's sufferings – if one has done so aright, through the help of the Holy Spirit – will first reveal the inexpressible ransom price the Lord had to pay for the sin of this world.

This will "mortify the flesh" and keep the earnest believer humble in attitude. How? Many Christians like to get involved in theological debates as to who killed Christ. But the Holy Spirit will soon make aware it was YOUR sin that made it all necessary!

The famous Dutch artist Rembrandt was quick to see this. In his painting of the Crucifixion, the faces of the people involved in the act are in full view, but hidden in the shadows there is another figure. We are told this was a self-portrait of Rembrandt, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus to the tree!

Encouragement in Trials

Meditating on Christ's sufferings is also intended to produce encouragement for the Christian in his daily life and be an example for him to follow.

For the sake of time, we will sum up the many wonderful works written on the subject with the following observation, "As Aaron's rod swallowed up all the other rods, so the griefs of Jesus make our griefs disappear."

Last, by meditating on Christ's sufferings one will automatically participate in them, resulting in a more intimate knowledge of the heart of God, nothing of which can be accomplished in Heaven!