

The High Calling

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.”

—*Ephesians 1:18,19*

this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14

SO GRAND IS THE CALLING

of the Gospel Age followers of Christ, that it has been termed a “high calling.” Concerning this, the encouraging words of the Apostle Paul should inspire us to an even greater appreciation of the privilege of being recipients of such an invitation. With humility and zealous determination, he says, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but

A MYSTERY

The High Calling, from a number of aspects, is termed a “mystery” by the Apostle Paul. He says, “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. . . . Eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, . . . the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” (I Cor. 2:7,9,10) In another place, Paul writes, “This is a great mystery: . . . I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:32) To understand these and other “mysteries” related to the High Calling, Paul intimates that something more than human ability is required, because it is “hidden wisdom.” To receive such wisdom requires that we have faith in God and in the shed blood of our Lord Jesus. It also necessitates an enlightened mind through the influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

The High Calling of God is the glorious invitation extended to those whom he desires to have a share in the heavenly inheritance to which Christ Jesus has already entered. Following the words of our opening text, in which he speaks of the “hope of [our] calling,” Paul says that this calling was “according to the working of [God’s] mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, . . . and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph. 1:19,20,22,23) Thus we see that the Heavenly Father, his son Christ Jesus, and Christ’s bride and joint-heir—recipients of the High Calling—all have important responsibilities with regard to its accomplishment.

REQUIREMENTS

To be partakers of this High Calling, Paul says we must “be Christ’s”—that is, we must belong to him. “Then,” he continues, “are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:29) To

belong to Christ requires that we first accept the merits of his ransom sacrifice on our behalf, but this is not all. It also means that we make a full consecration to God to do his will, and as part of that will, be immersed into Christ's sacrificial death, and receive the begetting of God's Holy Spirit.—Rom. 12:1; 6:3,4; I Thess. 4:8

In harmony with these requirements, we are to additionally develop in our character the spirit, or disposition, of the Master, striving to be more and more conformed to his character likeness. This will necessitate severe testing and trial, just as Jesus endured. If we are of those "called according to his purpose," God states, through the apostle, that we must "be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. . . . Them [Jesus' brethren] he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."—Rom. 8:28-30

Much is essential to our development in order to reach this ultimate condition of being "glorified"—God's promise to us if we are faithful "brethren" of his Son. How important it is that we echo in our life the sentiments of the Apostle Paul when he wrote, concerning himself, "This one thing I do, . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Then he encourages us along the same line, saying, "Let us therefore, . . . be thus minded." (Phil. 3:13-15) For Paul, and for us, pressing "toward the mark for the prize" includes the development of love—supreme love of God and his Son, love of righteousness, love of our fellow brethren, and sympathetic love for the world, even our enemies. Although we cannot

exercise these aspects of love perfectly in word and action, we must develop perfection of intention and a heart-likeness to God and his Son that are immovable and fully loyal. Such a crystallization of character, acquired by continually fighting “the good fight of faith” and “by patient continuance in well doing,” will enable us to attain “glory and honour and immortality.”—I Tim. 6:12; Rom. 2:7

SPECIAL CLASS FORETOLD

The Abrahamic Covenant, or promise, first recorded in Genesis 12:3 and repeated in Genesis 22:18, declares God’s purpose that through the “seed” of Abraham, blessings will eventually flow to all families of the earth. Although promised and foretold many centuries ago, we have not yet seen these blessings go forth to mankind. This is because part of the “seed” through which these blessings will flow is the “high calling” class, which is still being developed. Indeed, Paul says that this “seed” class was “chosen . . . in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we [those developed under this arrangement] should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Eph. 1:4) Here again we have pointed out to us the strict qualifications necessary to be part of this special class—“be holy,” “without blame,” “in love.”

The Scriptures use a number of other terms to identify the “seed” or “high calling” class. Paul calls this group the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” and also tells us that Christ Jesus is “the head over all things to the church, which is his body.” (Heb. 12:23; Eph. 1:22,23) In still another reference, he calls them Jesus’ “brethren,” the

“children which God” has given him. (Heb. 2:11,13) The Apostle Peter speaks of them as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” (I Pet. 2:9) Under Christ as their High Priest they are being developed now to be part of the greater “royal” priesthood which will dispense the blessings promised to “all the families of the earth.”

John the revelator records: “They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) The millennial reign and priesthood of Messiah and his faithful “body” members will be a time for uplifting and blessing mankind, just as God promised to Abraham so many centuries ago. During this same millennial period of the world’s regeneration and restitution of all that was lost because of Adam’s transgression, man’s great Adversary, Satan, will be bound. (vss. 1,2) In addition, it will be a time when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth, and in which the earth itself will no longer be cursed, but restored to a paradise condition.—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; Rev. 22:3

PREPARATION AS PRIESTS AND KINGS

The present mission of those running for the mark of the prize of the High Calling is their development and training for the future work of service as priests and kings in the next age. If we would be prepared to teach the world lessons such as meekness, patience, brotherly kindness, longsuffering, and love, we must first develop these qualities of character in ourselves. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) The development of these fruits and graces of the

spirit is vital to our being made ready for the glorious work before us.

Because the vast majority of mankind has been blinded by the “god of this world,” they are not recipients of God’s High Calling, and are not presently being judged as to their service to the living God. (II Cor. 4:4) As consecrated footstep followers of Christ, we must remember that we walk a “narrow” way, and “few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) We are striving to be of a “little flock,” to whom it is the “Father’s good pleasure to give . . . the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

“Ye see your calling, brethren,” Paul says, “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” (I Cor. 1:26,27) The reason for this is given in verse 29: “That no flesh should glory in his presence.” As we “see [our] calling” in this light, Paul’s further admonition should find a lodging place in our heart: “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (vs. 31) James also comments on the special nature of this High Calling, saying, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”—James 2:5

We recall that under typical Israel’s Law Covenant the priestly office was distinct and separate from the position of king. In Messiah’s kingdom, however, the two offices will be combined, as illustrated by Melchisedec. We read in Genesis 14:18,

and Paul confirms in Hebrews 7:1, that he was “king of Salem” and “priest of the most high God.” The glorified Jesus is spoken of in the Scriptures as “King of kings.” (Rev. 17:14; 19:16) In addition, Paul identifies him as a “high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb. 6:20) In this same verse he says Jesus is our “forerunner,” which means that we too, if faithful to our calling, will share with him in both the priestly and kingly office. Indeed, we are being “made . . . unto our God kings and priests,” the Revelator says, for the purpose of reigning and judging the world in righteousness with our head, Christ Jesus.—Rev. 5:10

Even now, we are engaged in a priestly work—not as kingly priests, but as sacrificing priests, pictured by Aaron and his sons. If we are faithful as sacrificing priests, after the order of Aaron, we will be given the privilege of being priests of the Melchisedec order, having the title of King added, and ruling with our Head over the nations for the purpose of blessing them and bringing them back into harmony with their Creator. The apostle declares, “The anointing [to this special office] which ye have received of him abideth in you.” (I John 2:27) The anointing John speaks of was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost which, along with its individual significance, also denoted God’s dedication of the entire body of Christ as the future Melchisedec priesthood. The one anointing to this office has continued to flow down through the entire Gospel Age. When the elect number coming under this anointing have all been “called, and chosen, and faithful,” and glorified with their head, Christ Jesus, the Gospel Age High Calling will end.—Rev. 17:14

NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK

In God's arrangement of the High Calling, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's"—that is, if you belong to Christ, regardless of nationality, gender, or other distinctions according to the flesh—"then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:28,29) In agreement with this, we also read, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." (Rom. 10:12) We may wonder why Paul felt the need to write such words as these. At that time there was much in the way of misunderstanding among the Jews who had accepted Christ. Many felt that they still had favor above the Greeks—Gentiles who had also come into Christ—and attempted to bind certain burdens of the Mosaic Law upon them.

The Jews were a people to whom "were committed the oracles of God." (Rom. 3:1,2) One of these "oracles" which became a major point of contention, and which many Jewish Christians tried to force upon their Gentile counterparts, was the law of circumcision. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul points out to them that their imposition of fleshly circumcision, in effect, made Christ of no profit. He concludes his comments a few verses later, saying, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." (vss. 2-6) The essence of Paul's argument was that there was nothing inherently wrong with literal circumcision or uncircumcision.

These were merely fleshly, outward things. Faith, working with love, he says, was of much greater importance as far as God was concerned. His law was no longer written “with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (II Cor. 3:3) This was a hard lesson for many to learn, but it represented an important part of the higher law given to those who would accept God’s High Calling.

In Christ, there is also neither “bond nor free, . . . male nor female.” God accepts all those who come to him through Christ without distinction as to such fleshly differences. These, as well as other differences among mankind, have been used by many in the world to gain advantage over others. However, if we have come into Christ, we are all one from God’s standpoint. He treats us all as his children, and has blessings for each in accordance with his will. Our loving Heavenly Father is able to help us be “more than conquerors through him that loved us” whether we are a master or a servant, rich or poor, young or old, man or woman. (Rom. 8:37) If we have called upon the name of the Lord with heart sincerity and a desire to do his will above all else, and in faith have accepted the merit of Christ’s blood, we are in a proper condition to be partakers of the High Calling.

FREE TO ALL

Another important aspect of our lesson is that the grace which has enabled the gospel message to enter into our hearts at the present time is a “free gift” from God. (Rom. 5:15) The Scriptures inform us that it will continue to be so in the future. The

revelator, speaking of the conditions afforded to all mankind in Christ's kingdom, says of that time: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17) God's "gift" of grace and "water" of truth are freely given, whether now to those who accept the High Calling, or in the future to the world as they are brought back into harmony with God in the kingdom. The only "cost" is heart obedience to the will of God.

For those being developed under the "high calling" arrangement at the present time, a special, important, privilege is pointed out to us by these words of the Master: "Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:8) As we have freely received much from the Heavenly Father, we should freely give to others by spreading forth the message of the Gospel. In a prophecy of the commission to be fulfilled by Jesus and his footstep followers, the prophet Isaiah says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach the good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (Isa. 61:1) This scripture speaks of giving a message, not of doom and gloom, but of hope, encouragement, and good news soon to come to pass in the earth. Such is the gospel witness that we, as Jesus did, are to "freely give" to all with a hearing ear.

The message we "freely give" to others will for the most part serve as one of hope and encouragement as we tell the good news of the kingdom. There is still the possibility, however, even in this latter part of the Harvest, that we might reach one

here and one there who are stirred to the extent that they, too, desire to become part of the “household of faith,” and run toward the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The Scriptures indicate that only the “meek and lowly in heart” will be in the proper condition of mind and heart to receive and understand the Truth as revealed through the Holy Spirit of understanding. (Matt. 11:29) As the psalmist writes, “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.”—Ps. 25:9

A YOKE

Still another point to consider with regard to the privilege of sharing in the High Calling relates to the symbol of a yoke. The Bible speaks of this as emblematic of labor or service in one form or another. Scripturally speaking, there are generally two classes of laborers. First, there are those more or less “yoked” to the world and its pursuits, laboring for things of the present fleshly life. Second, and these have always been the great minority, there are those whose primary desire in life is to labor for, and serve, the Heavenly Father, being “yoked” to him and his cause. Jesus spoke of these as ones who “labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.”—John 6:27

A yoke can also symbolize bondage, if that for which one is laboring is not in harmony with God’s present arrangements and purposes. There were those in our Lord’s day, and even today, who continued to labor under the yoke of the Law Covenant, putting themselves in a “yoke of bondage” to it,

rather than being made “free” in Christ. (Gal. 4:9,22-26; 5:1) Another yoke that all mankind, Jew and Gentile, has been under since Adam’s fall and under which they have labored to a greater or lesser degree, is the bondage to sin and death brought about by the working of Satan. We rejoice, however, that this yoke will soon be loosed by Jesus, who will “destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who . . . were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”—Heb. 2:14,15

If we are of those who have responded to God’s “high calling” during the present Gospel Age, we have had the privilege of being “justified by faith,” resulting in our obtaining “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) This is a special blessing indeed, for it has enabled us to put off the yoke of bondage to sin, and put on the yoke of Christ, becoming a co-laborer with him in the Father’s service. In his service we may, on many occasions, find relatively little peace and rest according to the flesh, but we will rejoice in that joy and calmness we find “by his Spirit in the inner man.”—Eph. 3:16

Our present rest of faith is founded in a knowledge of God’s plan and character. It claims with full assurance that Jesus has indeed “paid it all” for both the Jew and the Gentile. This present rest will one day be superseded by the actual rest of the kingdom. It will not be a rest of inactivity, but rather a full rest from any and all the cares we have had in this life which have been yokes of bondage to us in many ways and to various degrees. Then, we will be at rest from all these things, fully

prepared and fitted for “greater works” that God will give us. (John 14:12) For the present time, however, we must be engaged in binding together our time, influence, means, talents, and opportunities, directing them as much as possible in the Lord’s service.

Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32) It is the Truth which makes us free—free from the errors of the past; free from superstition; free to love God willingly, not through fear; free to believe his Word in its complete harmony; free to have trust and faith in our Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus, who have authored these glorious truths and brought them to light. Thus imbibed with God’s Word of truth, we can affirmatively respond to the invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—Matt. 11:28-30

JOINT-HEIRS

As previously noted, we have been given the opportunity to be “heirs according to the promise” given to Abraham. (Gal. 3:29) Paul expounds upon this further with these words: “We are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:16,17) There is an important qualification, however, attached to Paul’s statement in verse 17 that we are “joint-heirs with Christ”—“if so be that we suffer with him.”

To be inheritors with Christ of the high honor of being counted as part of the seed of Abraham, we must be like our Lord, not only in character likeness, but also as a partaker of his suffering.

“Ye are not your own, For ye are bought with a price,” Paul reminds us. (I Cor. 6:19,20) Since we have been “bought” with the price of Jesus’ blood, and have accepted it as the basis of our standing with God under his High Calling, our will now must be subservient to his in all matters. This includes the matter of suffering. God does not take pleasure in seeing any of his creatures suffer. Yet, he realizes that these kinds of experiences serve to shape and prepare us for our great future work as part of the Melchisedec priesthood. It is thus part of our training as those who have accepted God’s call to be tried and tested fully—including sacrifice and suffering. Peter and Paul speak of the far-reaching worth of these experiences, saying, “The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—I Peter 1:7; II Cor. 4:17

What is it that we will inherit as joint-heirs with Christ if we prove faithful to our calling? The Scriptures help us to answer this question. God, speaking prophetically through the psalmist concerning his faithful Son and his associates, says, “I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Ps. 2:8) Jesus made this additional statement:

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) These verses speak of two things which the Christ, head and body, will inherit—the heathen and the earth. The “earth” refers to the literal planet Earth upon which man dwells. In Christ’s kingdom, the earth will have its present “curse” removed, and be restored to a paradise condition as man’s eternal home. (Gen. 3:17; Rev. 22:3) It will be our privilege, if faithful, to inherit the earth and make it once again suitable for man’s abode.

Christ and his faithful bride will also inherit the “heathen,” which simply means “nations” or “peoples.” All who are in their graves will “come forth”—Jews and Gentiles alike—to be taught under the direction of the spiritual seed of Abraham. The faithful “ancient worthies,” who lived prior to our Lord’s First Advent and thus could not be granted the privilege of coming under the terms of the High Calling, will serve as Christ’s earthly representatives in this great education process of mankind. Natural Israel will also play a role in this, as they will be the first among mankind to recognize the Messiah’s hand in the affairs of earth. They will be blessed as a result and become the beginning nucleus of those who will walk in the “way of holiness.” (Isa. 35:8) Ultimately, all nations and peoples, seeing God’s blessings flow to Israel, will desire to join with them and receive a share in the wonderful provisions of the kingdom. If we are faithful “joint-heirs” with Christ, we will inherit the great privilege of being used to bring these things to pass, and to bless “all families of the earth.”—Gen. 12:3

GEMS OF GOD

In this lesson, we have considered many aspects of the High Calling and the necessary steps of development we must take to be faithful to this grand invitation. One of the beautiful symbols used in the Scriptures to describe those being selected for this honored position is that of the Lord's jewels. The Prophet Malachi uses this symbolism; however, prior to doing so, he reminds us that even as we are being developed as gems of God, the general wickedness of the world continues all about us. "Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." (Mal. 3:15) It should not surprise, nor discourage us, to witness such conditions as we seek to go "against the current" by the development of humility, righteousness, and meek submission to God's holy will.

The prophet then gives the needed encouragement to those striving to be pleasing to God. He says, "Then they that feared [reverenced] the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name." (vs. 16) We note three activities which are mentioned as being engaged in by those spoken of in this verse—they reverence the Lord above all, they speak often to each other in fellowship as a means of mutual support and encouragement, and they think upon God's name and his wonderful plan. It is only through habitually making such activities part of our daily walk that we can successfully

combat the evil conditions in the world in which we live.

Finally, the prophet records these wonderful words, which are in reality not his words at all, but the words of the Heavenly Father himself. He says concerning those who reverence him, speak often one to another, and think upon his name, "They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." (vs. 17) The first of these was our Lord Jesus. Additional jewels of various sizes and shapes constitute his "body" members. These are being cut, polished, and prepared during the Gospel Age. If we have responded to God's invitation by making a full consecration to do his will, then we are counted as one of these gemstones.

It is God who has called us as these potential jewels, rough at first, but able to be shaped and chiseled by him and his Son—master workmen, and capable of carrying out this wonderful work. It is our responsibility to be humbly submissive to the work being done in us to make us gemstones of high quality and beauty. Then, by being patterned after the perfect example of our Master, and by walking in his footsteps even unto death, we will be mounted as jewels. How we long for this time, and the complete fulfillment of the words, "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. 50:5) Let us each strive to the best of our ability, with the help of the Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, and one another, to attain unto "the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

