

Claiming Christ's Promise—

“Fear Not, Little Flock”

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

—*Luke 12:32*

THE “KINGDOM” IS ONE

of the prominent themes of the Bible, being referred to considerably more than a hundred times in the New Testament alone. The Bible’s many references to the kingdom fall into two general categories—one having to do with its rulers and the other with its subjects. The references of scripture pertaining to the rulers in the kingdom include those which set forth the conditions upon which one may hope to attain to such a high position, while the references to the subjects of the kingdom include the many promises of the blessings of joy and life which, through the kingdom agencies, will be showered upon them.

When Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” he referred to the hope of sharing in the

rulership of the kingdom. Jesus addressed this assurance to his disciples, who at that time were composed entirely of the natural descendants of Abraham. Long centuries before this, God had promised the Israelites as a nation that if they were obedient to his law he would make of them a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation,” and Jesus’ disciples, by accepting him and following in his footsteps of self-sacrifice, were proving their worthiness to inherit this promise.—Exod. 19:5,6

However, there were not many in Israel at that time to whom it was “the Father’s good pleasure” to give the kingdom. The majority followed the leadership of their religious rulers by rejecting the one whom God had sent to be the King in the long-promised kingdom, so he said that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to a nation “bringing forth the fruits” of obedience and righteousness. (Matt. 21:43) Later, the Apostle Peter identified this new “nation” to which the kingdom would be given when, addressing an epistle to “the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” he said, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” To this, Peter adds, “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.”—I Pet. 1:1; 2:9,10

Peter’s reference is to Gentile believers who had become God’s chosen, or elect people, “through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience.” (I Pet. 1:2) The Scriptures reveal, however, that the first of these who comprised the new nation to which the opportunity for eventual rulership in the kingdom was given were believing Jews. In John

1:11,12, we read concerning Jesus, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” It is the “sons,” or children of God, by faith and obedience who will share the rulership of the kingdom with Jesus. Paul wrote, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) Thus, to this special class, a key element to their development of the “mind of Christ” is the importance of claiming the promise, “Fear not, little flock.”

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION

We note Paul’s words—“if so be that we suffer with him.” This is one of the conditions upon which followers of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, may hope to reign with him. In another place Paul, in exhorting the brethren to continue in the faith, explained that it is through “much tribulation” that we will “enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22) On the night before he was crucified, Jesus said to his disciples much the same thing, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

How reassuring it is to hear Jesus say to us, “Fear not,” with the explanation, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Offering us the “prize of the high calling” is not something that our Heavenly Father reluctantly does. It is his “good pleasure.” He wants us to “live and reign with Christ,” and has placed all the necessary resources

at our disposal to enable us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.—Phil. 3:14; 4:13

So fear not! “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves,” Jesus further said. While he wants us so far as possible to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” we need not be concerned that we will be devoured by the “wolves,” for they will be permitted merely to threaten us with harm. (Matt. 10:16) This is in order that our faith and confidence in the Heavenly Father and his ability to care for us might be tested. Fear not, for actually there is no one that can harm us, no circumstance or combination of circumstances that can injure us as “new creatures” so long as we do “that which is good.”—I Pet. 3:13,14

In exercising the wisdom of serpents, “Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.” However, fear not, “when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”—Matt. 10:17-20

Many of the little flock at the beginning of the age experienced literally these aspects of persecution. It has been true of some even in this end of the age. We are confident that all of these experienced the fulfillment of the Master’s promise that the Father, through the Holy Spirit, was present to give the needed aid, to strengthen them, and to give them utterance in bearing witness to the Truth. Those who use their quiet moments to study and to meditate upon the Word of God will be so filled

with its message, that out of this rich abundance of their hearts the Lord will enable them to speak forth the proper words of life and truth under any and all circumstances.

Fear not, for even though members of our own family or household may be opposed to us, he whose good pleasure it is to give us the kingdom will stand by us in our most severe moments of loneliness and ostracism. This will be true even though “the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death,” and even though you will be “hated of all men for my name’s sake.”—Matt. 10:21,22

“Fear not,” the Master tells us, for the Father is merely testing our loyalty to him. It is his good pleasure to exalt us to the divine nature to reign with Christ, and he wants to prove us to see if we love him more than father, or mother, or sister, or brother, or even our own life. So we must be faithful, yielding to whatever experiences divine love may permit. Our faith should enable us to trust him, come what may, knowing that it is the Father’s good pleasure for those who are faithful unto death to receive a crown of life.

We, however, do not seek persecution. “When they persecute you in this city, flee into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come.” (vs. 23) Neither should we, through fear, retreat in the face of persecution. Instead, remembering the Master’s admonition, “fear not,” we should be prepared to face any experiences which the Lord’s providences may permit. On the other hand, it is sometimes

better to withdraw from a trying situation and seek opportunities of service elsewhere, or along other lines. To do this might require more grace and courage, but we should follow the leadings of the Lord whatever the cost might be.

AS HIS MASTER

How needful it is to be reminded by Jesus that we cannot expect to experience fewer difficulties in the world than those which surrounded and confronted him. "The disciple is not above his master," Jesus said, "nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."—Matt. 10:24-26

Paul wrote, "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Heb. 12:3) Jesus' enemies attributed wrong motives to much that he did and said. He was the prince of devils, they said, and a blasphemer. Again, "Fear not," said Jesus. While the world will treat us as it treated him, our true position of loyalty to the Father, and to his great kingdom cause, will in his due time be recognized, "for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed." Meanwhile, he whose pleasure it is to give us the kingdom, and who is able to read the heart, knows our love for him. Since we have been called according to his purpose, he will cause all things, even the false charges that may come against us, to work together for our good.—Rom. 8:28

Our enemies, and the enemies of the Heavenly Father, may “kill the body,” but fear not, for they are not able to take away life eternal. (Matt. 10:28) If we have taken up our cross to follow Jesus we must expect to die sacrificially, because we have presented ourselves for that purpose. (Rom. 12:1) The only way now to save our life and to live and to reign with Christ, is to lose our life in sacrifice. (Matt. 16:25) To suffer and to die with Jesus is the manner in which it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

As we lay down our life in sacrifice, and one after another of those earthly things which we may have once cherished are destroyed, we may at first wonder if the Heavenly Father really cares, but fear not. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”—Matt. 10:29-31

“Beloved, think it not strange,” wrote Peter, “concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Since we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, it is the good pleasure of the Heavenly Father to sustain us in every trial, for “the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.”—I Pet. 4:12,13; 3:12

It is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom only to those who seek for it with all their hearts, making every other interest of life of secondary

consideration. There are certain necessities to which we must give attention, such as food, raiment, and a place to live for ourselves and for our families. However, these are to be viewed in the light of seeking “first” the kingdom of heaven. “Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. . . . Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Luke 12:29-31

SECURE IN HIM

“My sheep,” said Jesus—that little flock to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom—“hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) Have we heard the “voice” of Jesus, the voice of truth, inviting us to take up our cross and follow him? If we have, and we have accepted his invitation, then we are secure if we continue on in this way of righteousness, for Jesus said, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”—John 10:28,29

“I and my Father are one,” said the Master. (vs. 30) Just as it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom, it is Jesus’ good pleasure also. “The Father himself loveth you,” and Jesus loves us also. (John 16:27) “Having loved his own which were in the world,” we read that Jesus “loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1) He gladly laid down his life for them, that they might have life, and be with him in his kingdom.

The good pleasure of the Heavenly Father and of Jesus is shown in the precious promises made to his disciples, many of which were given by Jesus in the “upper room” the night before his crucifixion. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. . . . I go to prepare a place for you, And if I go, . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3) Fear not, for Jesus went away to appear in the presence of the Father for us, so that if we continue to love him, and keep his commandments, we may ask whatever will be for our highest interest as members of his little flock, and it will be given unto us.—vss. 13-15

“MUCH FRUIT”

As we have noted, Jesus said that the kingdom would be given to a nation, or people, bringing forth the fruits, and in the upper room he said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:8) Paul wrote, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22,23) In a sense, love is the sum of all these, and this is the love which emanates from the Father. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”—John 15:9,10

The little flock to whom it is the Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom, is an elect, or chosen, people. However, it is essential to make that “calling

and election sure,” and that is done by bearing much fruit. “Unto us,” Peter wrote, are given “exceeding great and precious promises,” the purposes of these being to assist us in attaining unto the divine nature, and to association with Jesus in his kingdom.—II Pet. 1:4

These “precious promises” are among the evidences of the Father’s good pleasure. He wants to give us the kingdom, and he has provided every needed help in order that we might attain to this high position, but there is the necessity of bearing much fruit. So we are to give “all diligence” in adding to our “faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:5-11

“FEAR NOT”

Because of his knowledge of the Old Testament promises of God, Jesus could, with authority, assure his disciples of the Father’s love and protection, and, therefore, that they had no need to fear. How strengthening it is to our faith to hear the Father speak to us

through Jesus, “Fear not.” If we love him with all our heart we will be dwelling in the “secret place” which God has provided, that place of security that is overshadowed by his love and power.—Ps. 91:1

The psalmist said of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” We, too, can claim this promise, because we have the Master’s own assurance that the Father loves us even as he loved him. (Ps. 91:2; John 17:23) “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,” our “adversary the Devil,” who goes about as a roaring lion “seeking whom he may devour.” Yes, the psalmist continues, “he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.”—Ps. 91:3,4; I Pet. 5:8

The mother hen must take pleasure in protecting her chickens under her feathers and wings. So our Heavenly Father, whose good pleasure it is to give us the kingdom, will see to it that “no evil” shall befall us, and that no plague shall come nigh our dwelling. So we fear not, claiming the promise: “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night: nor for the arrow that flieth by day.” (Ps. 91:5) None of the bitter words of envy and hatred will harm us if we have on the whole armor of truth and abide in the Father’s love. Because it is his good pleasure to give us the kingdom, he will help us to fight every battle in the “good fight of faith” that we might come off “more than conquerors” and receive the promised “crown of life.”—I Tim. 6:12; Rom. 8:37; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10

Fear not, for “he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) Jesus claimed this promise for himself, and told

Peter that if he wished, he could ask his Father, and the Father would send “more than twelve legions of angels” to protect him. (Matt. 26:53) Jesus did not ask this protection as a man, for he had come to give his flesh for the life of the world. However, he did realize the protection and care which were afforded him as a New Creature by the holy angels, who, he said, “always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10) The same is true of us. How wonderful it is to be in the encircling arms of divine love in which we can enjoy the same benefits of the Father’s good pleasure as were bestowed upon Jesus.

Continuing in Psalm 91, the Heavenly Father speaks to Jesus and to us, the little flock, whom he will not allow to be plucked out of his hands, saying, “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life [immortality] will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.”—Ps. 91:14-16

Have we set our love upon the Heavenly Father? Then we may be sure that he will deliver us, even as he delivered Jesus. He will set us on high, even as Jesus was highly exalted, and we can call upon our Heavenly Father and be assured of an answer. Jesus’ life confirmed this statement, “I will be with him in trouble.” Jesus was not delivered, or spared from trouble, but he was given strength by the Heavenly Father to overcome. To us, he said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) We

know that the same power which enabled Jesus to overcome will give us strength to bear our burdens, and courage to go forward, knowing that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

Just as the Father was with Jesus in trouble, so he will be with us, and in his own due time will deliver us in the "first resurrection" to live and to reign with Christ. This is the Father's good pleasure for us, and also Jesus' good pleasure, for he said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21

What more could the Heavenly Father say to assure us of his love and protection, and of victory! So fear not, knowing "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul's conclusion was that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. 8:32-39

Let us then remember the words, "Fear not, little flock." Though we may be small in number, unnoticed and unknown to the world except as objects of scorn, yet the great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, our Heavenly Father, wants us to share with his Son in the rulership of a world government which will establish peace throughout the earth, and assure joy, health, and life to all mankind. It is his good pleasure that his faithful little flock shall have this kingdom! ■