

Abounding Thankfulness

*“As ye have
therefore received
Christ Jesus the
Lord, so walk ye in
him: Rooted and
built up in him,
and stablished in
the faith, as ye
have been taught,
abounding
therein with
thanksgiving.”
—Colossians 2:6,7*

THE OBSERVANCE OF A DAY

of thanksgiving each year in the United States originated with the early settlers of New England. Many of these people had made the hazardous journey across the Atlantic Ocean to a new world in America to escape bitter religious persecutions that were being practiced in many parts of Europe at that time. After their arrival it was also necessary for them to secure food, clothing, and shelter in a strange and faraway land. Having endured these difficult circumstances, it seemed appropriate that when they were later able to harvest their own crops and to lay away sufficient provisions, that they devote a day of special thanksgiving to God for taking care of them.

Great changes have taken place since those early settlers first conceived of the idea of setting aside a special Thanksgiving Day. The custom continues

until now in the United States, and it will be celebrated this year on Thursday, November 26th. This observance has provided many people living in this great country with the opportunity to at least once a year remember our loving Heavenly Father to whom they owe their very existence. For this, we may truly be thankful.

THANKSGIVING EVERY DAY

Those who have devoted their lives to the doing of God's will and have accepted our Lord Jesus as their head, consider every day as one of thanksgiving. To these, every experience of life, whether it be joy or sorrow, is an occasion for thanksgiving. They know that they are constantly under the shadow of the Lord's loving providences, all of which are designed by him for their highest and eternal good. These thank God not only for the sunshine and the rain, but also for the experiences of sorrow and pain. They have come to realize that under divine guidance the deepest shades of sorrow often yield the richest fruitage of peace and joy in the Lord.

Sorrow and trials may generate a larger degree of thankfulness. This may be true especially with the consecrated child of God. Some who have been bedridden for years and have suffered untold agonies are often more appreciative of divine grace than those whom the Lord permits to serve him under more normal circumstances. Their experiences have caused them to depend more fully upon our loving Heavenly Father, and they have learned to live closer to him, being ever conscious of their continuing need of his help.

THANKFUL HEARTS

Many faithful servants of God in the past were men who endured much hardship, yet their hearts were filled with thankfulness. This was true of the Apostle Paul. Few followers of the Master have suffered more than he did, yet we find no word of complaint in all of his writings. His suffering was brought about mostly by his faithfulness in serving our Heavenly Father, and this was in keeping with the message, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."—Acts 9:16

Paul accepted his commission and zealously devoted himself to a course of faithfulness in the service of God, which brought upon him nearly continuous suffering and trial. Yet, he continued unwaveringly in the narrow way of sacrifice and suffering, and with a heart filled with thankfulness. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—II Cor. 4:17

RICHES OF GRACE

The apostle's faithfulness to the divine call enabled him to suffer and die with Christ, and led to his imprisonment at Rome where he wrote the exhortation to thankfulness contained in our featured text. (Col. 2:6,7) His epistle to the church at Colosse was written with the spirit of love and thankfulness to the Lord for the riches of divine grace which had been bestowed upon him. He did not mention his own trying circumstances as a prisoner at Rome, but only asked "Remember my bonds."—chap. 4:18

Paul was more concerned for the spiritual welfare of the brethren at Colosse than with his own trials. He had never visited these brethren and was not acquainted with them, but in his letter he wrote, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."—chap. 1:9

He also prayed for their spiritual growth and understanding. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."—vss. 10-13

SELFLESS THANKFULNESS

The Apostle Paul's selfless thankfulness is thus shown in his desires on behalf of the brethren at Colosse, and helps give weight to his words. His own spirit of thankfulness is reflected by the fact that he admonishes those to whom he writes that they should give thanks to God for having delivered them from the 'power of darkness,' and this has been made manifest in their hearts by the Gospel of Truth.

It was his faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ that had taken him to prison in Rome. Someone

with less faith and vision might have reasoned that however true the Gospel might be, it was not worth the cost. However, Paul had full assurance of faith and understood well the implications of the Truth, and he could look back over the years and recall his experiences of suffering and yet praise the way the Lord had led him.

STEADFAST IN TRUTH

Paul desired that the brethren at Colosse remain steadfast in the Truth. Failure to properly appreciate the Truth of the Gospel is one of the major causes of instability in the Truth. This was true in Paul's day and it is still true today. If we truly appreciate the Truth and give thanks to God for it daily, we will not become restless.

The history of the professed followers of the Master throughout this present Gospel Age has often been one of apostasy and of falling away from the faith. Paul foretold this in his letter to the Thessalonians. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."—II Thess. 2:3,4

He warned that after his death there would come a great 'falling away' from the faith, and this occurred during the time of the Dark Ages. During the Protestant Reformation, each reformer made a bold stand for truth as he understood it, but these new concepts of truth were not readily or steadfastly upheld by their followers.

TESTS OF FAITH

The same test of faith is now upon the Lord's people at the end of this present Gospel Age. While we all want to grow in grace and in knowledge, one of the tests upon us is to remain steadfast in what we have already learned to be the Truth. Thankfulness for the Lord's goodness in revealing to us the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is essential to steadfastness. We must be truly thankful for the Truth, and to not forget the darkness from which we have been delivered.

LIFTED UP

The Psalmist David spoke of this darkness and said, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit [a pit of noise, *Marginal Translation*], out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." (Ps. 40:2) 'Noise' is used in the Scriptures to symbolize confusion. The confusion of our hearts and minds with which we were surrounded in the world before we learned the Truth, was very horrible. In this pit was also found 'miry clay.' We had no firm foundation upon which to stand, but the Lord lifted us up and set our 'feet upon a rock.' Instead of the miry clay and sinking sand of human imperfection which could not give us a proper standing before the Lord, our feet were placed upon the sure foundation of Christ.

The psalmist also said that the Lord establishes our goings. (vs. 1) In the pit of confusion, we had no definite objective in life, and we were aimlessly drifting along with the world. But the Lord lifted us out of our confusion and revealed to us a real objective. He has also given us a way in which to

walk in order that we might attain that objective. The Lord established the Apostle Paul's goings as he wrote, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:14

ESTABLISHED IN FAITH

A hope was set before us of which Paul also writes, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." (Col. 1:5) No longer is our life confusing and uncertain. As the Apostle Paul stated in our featured scripture, we are now, "Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Col. 2:7) If we are thus established, our thanksgiving is sure to abound. However, if we cease to be thankful for the wonderful things the Lord has done in lifting us out of the pit of noise and setting our feet upon a rock, there will be the danger of our falling away from the faith.

A NEW SONG

David proclaimed that when the Lord established our goings, he also put a "new song" in our mouths, even praise unto our God. (Ps. 40:3) This 'new song' was given to us in order that we might show forth the praises of our God. It is important for us to continue singing it, that his name may be glorified. This new song is the Truth of the divine plan, and no man can learn it except the select few who are being called during this present Gospel Age. (Rev. 14:3) This is in keeping with the realization that the human mind is incapable except by divine grace of understanding the mysteries of the

kingdom of God. David declared that the Lord puts this song in our mouths. It is God-given through the wonderful working power of the Holy Spirit, and it cannot be discovered or learned by any others who may desire to pry into the secrets of the divine plan.

If we have learned this new song there is surely much cause for abounding therein with thanksgiving, for it means that the great God of the universe has taken us into his confidence and has revealed to us some of the hidden things of his glorious plan of the ages. He has dispelled the darkness with which we were once surrounded, and has brought us out of confusion. The many unanswered questions which may test our faith at times, have now been clarified. Through his Word we see his glory displayed by his infinite wisdom, almighty power, unswerving justice, and abounding love. For this, we give much thanks.

The song which God put in our mouths grows more melodious as we continue to sing it to one another and, as we have opportunity, to others of the fallen human family. It is a new song, and yet at the same time it is also the old, old story which seems each time we tell it to be more wonderfully sweet. We trust that this has been our experience during the past year, and that this song is more precious to us today than it was on Thanksgiving Day a year ago. May we be more established in the Truth now than we were last year at this time. During the past year, many of the Lord's people have been richly blessed by opportunities to sing the new song. All, however, should be the most thankful people in all the world.

GOD'S CONTINUING PROVIDENCE

Perhaps our individual experiences throughout this past year have, in many instances, been different than in other years, but the same loving God has been watching over all his people during that time. We may not always have been able to recognize the wisdom of his dealings with us, but have been assured of his providence always. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:28

Every opportunity we have to do anything in the service of our God, along whatever line it may be, is an occasion for grateful thanksgiving. The more we bear testimony to the Truth, and the more we labor and sacrifice in order that others may have an opportunity of hearing the message of Truth, the greater will be our own appreciation to God for having called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) Therefore, every day will be one of thanksgiving in proportion to our continued faithfulness in proclaiming the glad tidings. This will be true only if, first of all, we have been emptied of self, and have permitted the Truth and its inspiring spirit to fill and to control our lives.

A PROPER HEART CONDITION

Paul expressed the proper attitude of heart when he wrote to the brethren at Corinth. He said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries,

and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”—I Cor. 13:1-3

To be established in the Truth implies not only an adherence to the doctrines of the divine plan, but also to possess the spirit of the Truth, and to have it fill and control our lives. It is only under these conditions that we will find ourselves abounding therein with thanksgiving. The Greek word here translated ‘abounding,’ means to superabound, or to be in excess. If we are abounding in the Truth with much thanksgiving, we will be filled to overflowing with its spirit. It will enlarge our hearts and lives, and in our thankfulness we will be singing aloud the praises of our God and telling the whole world these blessed tidings.

The same word ‘abounding’ was used again by the apostle in his first letter to the church at Corinth, encouraging them to greater faithfulness. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”—I Cor. 15:58

This is another cause for thankfulness—that our ‘labour’ will not be in vain. We may not always see the result of our efforts in proclaiming the Truth. If we are unselfishly seeking to know and to do God’s will in our every thought, word, and action by yielding ourselves completely to the molding and guiding influence of his Holy Spirit, we may be sure that our labors will not be in vain.

BE YE THANKFUL

To whatever extent the American people may offer their thanks to our loving Heavenly Father during this year's Thanksgiving holiday, our hope is that many will express their true thankfulness for their well-being, and the freedom they continue to enjoy by living in this great nation.

The Lord's people also receive and appreciate these very same blessings. May they too reflect on God's goodness and providence toward them, not only at this special season of the year, but every day throughout their consecrated walk in newness of life. Let us therefore esteem every day as a special time for giving thanks for our many blessings.

SPIRITUAL FOOD

Although we are thankful for the temporal food we receive, we are most thankful for the spiritual food that has been provided for us. This has been a special blessing during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, and it marks the promised return of our dear Lord Jesus. We are thus feeding upon the "meat in due season." (Matt. 24:45) "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."—John 6:27-29

Luke has recorded one of our Lord's wonderful parables, in which he points to the 'meat in due season.' In the parable, Jesus admonishes his followers

to patiently watch and wait for his promised return at the end of this present Gospel Age. When he comes, they will thus recognize his 'knock,' and will quickly open the door of their hearts to him. At that time, he will invite them to partake of the rich spiritual food that he has come to serve. (Luke 12:36,37) The revelator has also written in connection with our Lord feeding and supping with his people, saying, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—Rev. 3:20

EXPRESSIONS OF THANKFULNESS

Let us remain steadfast in the faith, and may the Truth and its spirit overflow from our hearts to refresh and bless others. May this 'abounding' faith of which Paul spoke in our featured scripture continue to be an unselfish expression of our heartfelt thankfulness to our loving Heavenly Father. Let us be ever mindful of his having brought us up out of the horrible pit and from the miry clay, and for having set our feet upon a rock. May the fact that he has established our goings also be a continuous cause for thanksgiving, and may our thanksgiving be expressed by continuing to sing the new song which God has put into our mouths.

As the Psalmist David encourages us, "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD." (Ps. 40:3) We do not always know the effect upon others who may hear us sing this wonderful song. Our privilege and joy is to sing aloud the praises of our God by making known the glorious

Truth regardless of the result. If we are faithful in doing this, perhaps some may learn to trust in the Lord and give thanks to him for having heard a strain of the new song and to appreciate some of its wonderful harmony. Let us be thankful for the opportunity we may have to lift up the voice of praise and thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father.

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