

Opening the Windows of Heaven

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”
—*Malachi 3:10*

THE SERVANTS OF GOD should be the most blessed of all people. If they are not, it may be that they are living below their privileges. When God enters into a covenant relationship with his people, never does he fail to fulfill his part of the agreement. This was true with the natural house of Israel, and it is true of those now who have entered into a covenant with him by sacrifice. (Ps. 50:5) Natural Israel could have

been rich in the blessings of the Lord. However, because of unfaithfulness, the nation was eventually removed from God's favor, and the people were scattered.—Matt. 23:37,38; Luke 21:20-24

In our text the Lord calls attention to the tithing system which he gave to Israel, and by which the religious functions of the nation were maintained. The tithe was one-tenth of an individual's income, and this was to be put into the treasury of the Lord. However, in paying their tithes, Israel was unfaithful, and, as a result, the people became poor in all those natural bounties which could have been theirs had they been obedient. (Mal. 3:7,8) It was in answer to their complaint that Jehovah called upon the nation to change their ways. He directed them to bring their tithes "into the storehouse" and thus "prove" him, and discover that their lack of blessings had been their own fault, and not his. As our verse states, God was ready to "open the windows of heaven" and pour out blessings so rich and abundant that they would be unable to contain them.

The same is true of spiritual Israel. We are under a different covenant than were the ancient Israelites. Theirs was the Law Covenant, under which the Lord promised material blessings to those who were faithful to it. (Deut. 28:1-4) Under that arrangement it was reasonable that a tenth of their annual increase should be devoted to the Lord, and there was no excuse for not adhering to this requirement.

The covenant of this age is one of sacrifice, and under its arrangements no promise is made of material blessings. Ours is a spiritual, or heavenly calling. We are urged to set our "affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. 3:2) The sacrificial arrangements of our covenant with God do not call for rendering to him a mere tenth of what we possess, but "all" our time, our strength, our talents, are dedicated to him.—Rom. 12:1, *Weymouth New Testament*

To a large extent the nation of Israel walked by sight. To the degree that they were faithful to the Lord, their rewards were forthcoming, and were of a tangible sort which could be seen and appreciated. Ours, on the other hand, is a life of faith, and our appreciation of the spiritual blessings which the Heavenly Father is ever ready to shower upon us depends upon our understanding of what he has promised, and our ability to properly evaluate spiritual blessings in comparison to the material sacrifices which we have the privilege of making.

Throughout the centuries, the fallen human nature has tended mostly towards shortsighted self-interest. If by faith we do not rise above it, such thinking will still blind us to the real and eternal issues of life. We may feel a degree of satisfaction, perhaps even relief, that we are not living under the covenant that required a tenth. We know, however, that under our covenant of sacrifice the Lord expects us to give all. Because it is wholly a freewill offering, there is a danger that we may not render unto God even as much as the tenth which was required of Israel.

THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE

As we have noted, the blessings of the Lord during this age are not material, but spiritual. Are we receiving from him the abundant and overflowing portion which he has promised? There are, of course, two viewpoints of the Christian life. It is a narrow way in which we are walking, and oftentimes it is difficult. There are many trials to endure—trials of our faith—but even these should be considered a precious asset, because they are helping to prepare

us for the eternal joys which await us beyond the veil.—I Pet. 1:7; II Cor. 4:17

We are also called upon to suffer with Christ. Suffering is never pleasant according to the flesh, but we can look upon our experiences of this kind as blessings from God. It is through the privilege he has given us, as Paul states, to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ,” that we will have the privilege of living and reigning with him.—Col. 1:24; II Tim. 2:11,12

However, we are not to think of the Christian life merely from the standpoint of its difficulties or hardships. If we do we might become long-faced, sorrowful Christians. The Lord wants us to rejoice, not in the form of hilarity, but to have an abiding peace and confidence in him. By faith we are able to rejoice despite the trials of the narrow way. (Rom. 5:3-5) Indeed, a part of our present inheritance is the peace and joy which Jesus bequeathed to us when he said, “My peace I give unto you.”—John 14:27

The Master’s peace and joy were deeply rooted in his confidence in the Heavenly Father. He had full assurance that not one of all the precious promises of God would go unfulfilled. Not once did the Master doubt the victorious outcome of the divine plan and purpose, both for himself and for all mankind.

This peace of the Christian is ours in a full, rich measure if we can but lay hold of the promises of God as Jesus did. He explained that our peace is “not as the world giveth,” which at best is based upon human promises and human ability to make good these promises. Similarly, it is not a peace which, perhaps, is based upon a bank account, or

upon the hope of continuing in good health, or upon the security of an expensive home.

How little the world knows about true peace, which the Scriptures say surpasses all human understanding. (Phil. 4:7) The peace of God abides in the Christian's heart despite the turmoil and chaos with which he may be surrounded, and despite the fading of earthly hopes and joys! Most in the world work and strive nearly a lifetime with the hope of finding security and a consequent peace of mind and heart, yet this goal is often never attained. Even with those who are measurably successful, their peace is short-lived and frequently disturbed by doubts and fears of various sorts.

How rich indeed are we who have entered into a covenant of sacrifice with the Lord! It is essential, however, to fulfill our covenant if we would continue to enjoy the showers of heavenly blessings which make us so rich. Jesus said, "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." Then he adds, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."—John 15:10,11

As indicated in the foregoing passage, the peace and joy which can and should be ours depend upon keeping our covenant, and by obeying the commandment which Jesus gave. What is that commandment? Jesus stated it clearly, saying, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (vs. 12) There are many details and ramifications in the carrying out of this commandment, but in reality it comprises all that the Lord expects of his consecrated people.

Our covenant of sacrifice with God includes the privilege of loving our brethren as Jesus loved us. He loved us so fully that he “laid down his life for us,” and we are to “lay down our lives for the brethren.” (I John 3:14-16) The work of the Lord during the Gospel Age is the calling and preparation of Christ’s footstep followers to live and reign with him. (Rev. 20:4) In Revelation 19:7 this is spoken of as his “wife” making herself ready. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the great objective was the selection and making ready of the “bride” class. —Rev. 21:2,9,10

The work of preparation to be part of the “bride” of Christ has called for sacrifice and service on the part of every true Christian, and it is thus that their love for one another has been manifested. Our love for the brethren does not end with the efforts we put forth to reach them with the Gospel message. When they hear the message and accept it, and together with us enter into a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, they still need our love. This is a love that will be patient with their weaknesses and do everything possible to help them along in the narrow way. It is a love, too, when necessary, that will guard one another against the fiery darts of the great enemy, Satan. In short, to have a proper love for our brethren—the kind of love which Jesus manifested—means that we will sense our responsibility toward them, both in sharing the Gospel message by which they are reached and made our brethren, and also in assisting them thereafter.

In most united efforts the human tendency is to permit the few to shoulder the responsibility, while

the majority sit on the sidelines giving their approval, but doing little more than this. This is not the Lord's arrangement for his people. Each one who has entered into a covenant by sacrifice with the Heavenly Father is held responsible for faithfulness to that covenant. We cannot be victorious nor enjoy the riches of God's blessings simply because we are members of a congregation of Christians. We must be individually faithful!

COOPERATION IN THE MINISTRY

The Lord is pleased to have us cooperate in manifesting our self-sacrificing love for the brethren. An example of this is in the arrangement he has made for his people to meet together as ecclesias, or local congregations. In most Christian circles this arrangement has been distorted considerably, so that the clergy are considered the principal ones to serve, while others attend the church services merely to be served. This is a wrong viewpoint.

In the true church, every consecrated follower of the Master is to engage in service. Each individual Christian is instructed to lay down his life for the brethren. Some, indeed, may be chosen to teach, or to exhort publicly, but this does not relieve the others of the responsibility of being servants. How rich are the blessings of the Lord for those who maintain and practice this viewpoint! Those who associate with God's people with the thought of serving, as well as of being served, are the ones who receive the richest blessings.

A great deal is said in the New Testament about a general cooperation among the brethren. The individual congregations which made up the Early

Church were kept more or less in contact with one another through the ministry of the apostles and others. However, the spreading of the Gospel and the building up of the brethren was restricted by the extent to which the servants of the church could travel from place to place, and to the giving of personal testimonies concerning God's plan as it is centered in Christ Jesus.

Today we live in a much different world. The Gospel can still be spread by the personal testimonies and witness efforts of the brethren, but its proclamation is not limited to these individual efforts. Through the printed page, radio, television, the Internet, and many forms of electronic media, the Gospel message can go forth worldwide. Even this, though, is possible only through the general cooperation of the consecrated. The vast increase in communication technology, which has made this wider proclamation of the Gospel possible, is undoubtedly by divine providence. Thus, we cannot but believe that the Heavenly Father wants these facilities used to make known the glad tidings of the kingdom. Do we feel our privileges and responsibilities as we should in connection with this larger work of the church?

Notwithstanding the ability to share in promulgating a wider dissemination of the Truth, and of giving the comforting message of God's coming kingdom of peace, the principal objective of our sacrifice is still the service of the brethren. It is not God's time to convert the world, but it is his time to call, through the message of truth, those whom he is inviting to be joint-heirs with Christ. This should be our main purpose in making known the glad

tidings. As we do so, however, a witness is also given to the world. In this, too, we greatly rejoice, remembering Jesus' commission that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations."—Matt. 24:14

PAYING OUR TITHES

Every footstep follower of the Master knows that his life is consecrated to God and to his service. We also know that he requires not merely a tenth of what we have, but all that we have and are. Yet, at times there may be an unintentional indefiniteness about our consecration which tends to blur its objective. We know that we are to serve the Lord, and are willing to make any sacrifice whatever to do so, but how is it to be done? What are some of the practical ways in which we can pay our "tithes" to the Heavenly Father and thus rejoice in the blessings poured out upon us from the windows of heaven?

First, and this is true in every Christian's life, is our responsibility toward our families and any others dependent upon us. God wants that responsibility discharged faithfully, as unto him. Many have testified of the rich blessings which have been theirs as a result of endeavoring to provide for their own with an eye single to the glory of God.—I Tim. 5:8; I Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17

However, there is most always something left of time or means in the life of the Christian after their responsibilities toward their own are properly and faithfully discharged. Whether it be great or small, what can we do with this surplus of time, energy or means which we have covenanted to devote to the service of the Lord? The ultimate answer to this

question must, of necessity, be found by each individual child of God. None of us would presume to tell another brother or sister what they must do in the service of the Lord. All we can do is to point out what others have done, and the possibilities there may be of rendering practical service.

We may feel at times that there is so little we can do that we end up doing nothing. This is not the proper course. Even if we could put all our time directly into the Lord's service, and even if we were especially talented along some line which could be used in the spreading of the Gospel, or if we had millions of dollars to contribute to these efforts, we would still be unprofitable servants. Let us ever remember that God is not interested in how much we can do for him, but only that we do all we can.

Those who have only a few minutes each day which they can spend in the Lord's service, or a few pennies which they can devote to him, are just as pleasing in his sight as those who can do and give more. Recalling Jesus' lesson of the widow's mite, she had very little, but she gave all, which was more valuable in the Lord's sight than the large sums given by those who had great abundance. (Mark 12:41-44) The lesson, then, is that regardless of what we each have in the way of time, talent, and means, if we devote everything we can to his service, we are demonstrating the genuineness of our consecration. We thus will become partakers of the showers of blessings which continually flow from the windows of heaven to those who faithfully "bring all the tithes into the storehouse."

If we are living where we have the privilege of association with others of the Lord's consecrated

people, then we will want to be on the alert to render whatever direct service we can for their encouragement and blessing. We will want to cooperate zealously in whatever activities the ecclesia may be sponsoring. We will want to be faithful in assembling together with our brethren, and be as helpful as possible by participation in studies and testimony meetings.

These are all privileges of service which, when faithfully used, will increase our own rejoicing in the Lord. There is no truer saying than that which Paul accredits to Jesus, namely, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) It is easy to overlook this. We are prone to think of our relationship to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren merely from the standpoint of the advantages accruing to us! However, this is the sure way to spiritual poverty. When we get the viewpoint implied in our covenant of sacrifice and begin to search for ways and means of giving and serving for the blessing of others, then we will have real joy in the Lord, and we will find our lives as Christians flowing on in endless song.

GOD’S PROMISES

God’s promises to us as individuals are conditional. He has made every necessary provision for our blessing, but it is necessary for us to accept of his grace by complying with the conditions. (Eph. 2:4-8) It is not a matter of earning divine favor. If it were, then it would not be grace at all. That which we can do in response to the grace of our Heavenly Father is merely a matter of showing our appreciation of what he has done for us, and what he will

continue to do, if we give all diligence in the carrying out of our covenant of sacrifice.

Paul wrote, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Heb. 4:1) How can we come short of a promise? The thought is that we may come short of the conditions attached to the promises. In this text, Paul is speaking particularly of the rest of faith which is promised every footstep follower of the Master. Are we enjoying that rest as we should? If not, it would be well to examine ourselves to discover wherein we are failing to live up to our covenant, and to bring all our tithes into the storehouse.

Through the Scriptures, we learn that God has made every provision for our blessing. Our lives as New Creatures should be full and rich, overflowing with peace and joy in the Lord.

Through Christ’s redemptive work we have been given a robe of righteousness.—Isa. 61:10

The Holy Spirit guides and comforts us.—John 14:16-18; 16:13

The angels have been appointed our ministering spirits, and of these Jesus said that they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.—Heb. 1:13,14; Matt. 18:10

God has given us his Word, and in it we find his will for us and his plan for the world.—James 1:18

He has made provision for our fellowship with one another.—Heb. 10:25; I John 1:7

We have been served with “meat in due season,” so that we know the meaning of the chaotic events in the world by which we are surrounded.—Matt. 24:45

He has given us the assurance that no evil shall befall us, that no enemy, no matter how cunning or formidable, can take us from under his loving care.—Ps. 91:9,10

He has promised to be our refuge and fortress, a bulwark against all the opposing forces which endeavor to disrupt his plan and destroy his seed of promise.—Ps. 91:1-4; Gal. 3:29

He has said that he will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, but will provide everything that is good for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Ps. 84:11

He has assured us that all things shall work together for our good. Every experience, whether of joy or sorrow, will be permitted to enrich our lives and increase our joy in the Lord.—Rom. 8:28

Surely we cannot ask for more! All of these loving provisions are for us, to make us rich in the peace and joy of the Lord. Are we, through faithfulness to our covenant, keeping the windows of heaven open, that the life-giving waters of divine grace, mercy and strength may daily keep us refreshed and strong?

If we would enjoy God's grace we must daily go to him in prayer. If we would know his will we must study his Word and watch for his leading in our life. If we would have peace and rest of heart we must believe his promises and comply with the conditions attached to them. At every turn of the Christian way there is something for the follower of the Master to do. Taken together, it means the laying down of our lives in divine service, rejoicing in the shed blood of Jesus which makes our sacrifice acceptable, and enjoying the assurance of God

that he will guide and help us, that his strength will be made perfect in our weakness.

Through the grace of God in Christ Jesus we have entered into a spiritual land of plenty. Let us continue to abide therein by rendering to the Lord all that we have covenanted to do. Thus will the windows of heaven remain open throughout all the days of our earthly pilgrimage, and an abundant entrance into the kingdom will be assured when we have reached the end of the way.—II Pet. 1:10,11 ■