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CRUCIFIED & RISEN

"Jesus our Lord..... Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification" Rom. 4:25.

"IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME"

At this time of the year, our thoughts turn particularly to those momentous events in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago.

There it was that our dear Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, He who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners was cruelly put to death upon a Roman cross. There He suffered and died, "the just for the unjust"; there all the various types and prophecies of the Old Testament found their fulfilment in that One whom John the Baptist had earlier announced as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world".

So at this season, in remembrance of Him, Jesus our Saviour and Lord, we keep that simple Memorial service which He Himself instituted in that upper room, so long ago. We see again in the elements the giving of His life, the shedding of His blood, ultimately for the blessing of all mankind, but here and now for all those who have ears to hear His loving "follow me." Again we take to ourselves the merit of His blood and feast on Him who is the Bread of Life. We recall our privilege of following in His footsteps, to be dead with Him, of fellowship with Him in lives of obedience and sacrifice, and we renew our vows of consecration to His service.

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death, till He come," 1 Cor. 11:26. May each dear child of God be richly blessed as once again we heed His loving words. "This do in remembrance of me."

"HE IS RISEN"

But how thankful we are that the story does not end at the cross. Praise God, we serve a risen Saviour, and once more we can rejoice as we read the words of the angelic messengers to the two Marys who had gone so early on the first day of the week to the tomb where Jesus had been laid." He is not here, He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and go quickly, and tell His disciples." Matt. 28:6,7. The account goes on to tell that the two women departed quickly with fear (awe) and great joy and ran to tell the disciples. What joyous, awesome news indeed!

The resurrection of Jesus is truly the key to all the hopes of the Lord's people, as so beautifully reasoned out by the apostle Paul in the great resurrection Chapter 1 Cor. 15. Our Lord's own words to His disciples, in His tender last-night discourses recorded by John, might well be thought of as a "text" for the apostle's masterly exposition. "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." John 14:19.

The well-attested fact of Christ's resurrection is, furthermore, the assurance of the resurrection in due time and order of all mankind; firstly, the faithful followers of Jesus of this age in the "first" resurrection (Rev. 20:6), then the faithful servants of God of old times in that "better" resurrection, for which they looked (Heb. 11:35), and, finally, the remainder of mankind in the resurrection to judgement. (John 5:29.)

Well may we marvel at the fullness and the comprehensiveness of God's love and wisdom, as seen in His plans and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out!" Rom. 11:33

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." (1 Cor. 15:20)

He is risen – Hallelujah!

“Children of Promise”

“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” (Gal 4:28)

“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called; that is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” (Rom 9:7,8)

“The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:39)

There is surely something very special in being a child of promise. Every new child is a precious gift of God, but in the topic text in Gal 4:28 the apostle is making an analogy between those of this gospel age who have been called by God to be followers of His dear Son on the one hand and on the other hand Isaac, who was in a very special way a child of promise and a promised child. Paul had previously discussed and contrasted the dispensations of law and of grace, as represented in Ishmael, son of the bondwoman, and Isaac, the son of the free woman.

Before we proceed to look at the implications of this description – “children of promise” – let us consider the promise of a seed of blessing which God gave to Abraham, that grand old man of faith, indeed the father of the faithful, as he is elsewhere called. (Originally, his name was Abram and his wife’s Sarai, but both were later changed by God to reflect the promise.) In Gen 12:1-3, we read of God’s great promise of blessing, not only to Abraham himself, but through him and his descendants, culminating in the words so precious to students of God’s Word – “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” We refer to these words so very often, for the promise they contain is a foundation feature of God’s plan to cater for the restoration and the blessing of all His creation. Nor is its relationship to our Saviour and the Church widely recognized by many Christian people.

The promise was later repeated to Abraham and it was made clear that the blessing foretold was to come through his seed, i.e. a direct descendant. However, Abraham and his wife Sarah were already of advanced age and had no heir. We read in Gen 15 how Abraham reasoned with God along the lines that his steward might become his heir. God had just reassured Abraham in the words “I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward”, truly an all-embracing guarantee, but the problem of the heir still remained. “And Abraham said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abraham said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed, and lo, one born in my house is mine heir.” (Gen 15:2,3) It is evident that Eliezer was a very fine and trustworthy man; he had been born in Abraham’s house and by the usage of the time could have been made his heir.

THE HEIR

But this was not God’s way and we, like Abraham, need to wait upon our Heavenly Father for His way and His wisdom, not our own however seemingly good and well meant. So in Gen 15:4, we read God’s response to Abraham “The word of the Lord came unto him (Abraham), saying, This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come out of thy own bowels shall be thine heir.” Only a direct descendant would suffice, however impossible that seemed at the time. But time went on and the two remained childless, leading Sarah to propose that Abraham take her maid or bondservant to wife and in due time, Ishmael was born. Although God gave his mother, Hagar, assurances regarding her son, in God’s wisdom and purposes he was not to be the heir and when Abraham was 99 years old, God renewed His covenant of promise with Abraham and further promised that Sarah would bear a son and would be a mother of nations.

“And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed, and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his seed after him.” (Gen 17:19) Further on, we read of the fulfillment of these words in Gen 21:1-3 – “And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.” Here indeed, was the immediate fulfillment, at long last, of the promise. Many years had evidently passed since the original promise was given to Abraham, but in due time, God’s time, the “child of promise” was born, that child through whose descent the greater, ultimate seed of promise, our Lord, would eventually come.

But Abraham’s testing was not yet over and in Gen 22, we read how God instructed him to offer up his only son of promise for whom he and Sarah had so long waited. What a test this would be in any circumstances, but in this case how much more so! How trustingly Abraham responded we well know, how also a substitute was at the last moment provided in place of Isaac. In this incident, we see also the trustfulness of Isaac, as with a heavy hearted father he made his way to Mt Moriah. But apart from the testing of Abraham’s faith, what a clear fore-glimpse of the offering up of God’s own dearly beloved and only Son to be the Saviour of

the world. Paul tells us that God preached before the gospel to Abraham in the giving of the promise of blessing, here He prefigures to him the means by which the blessing will come. How much of the outworking of God's plan is seen indeed in his dealings with this faithful old patriarch.

THE BRIDE

Later on, the time came for a bride to be found for Isaac, the son of promise, and the mission of Abraham's chief servant back to his master's own country and kindred for this task is recounted in Gen 24. In this account, it is not difficult to see a foreshadowing of the calling of the bride for the greater Isaac, our Lord Jesus Christ. We see the great care and faithfulness of the servant in carrying out his mission. Many gifts were brought and presented to the damsel to whom God lead the servant and to her family. No doubt, the good character of Isaac was also well presented but it is notable that Rebekah was given the final decision to go with the servant or not. Her willingness to go to meet her future husband is notable; she had heard of his character and qualities and was ready, even though she had not yet seen him, to become his wife. How this reminds us of Peter's words – "Whom (Jesus Christ) having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet 1:8)

The account concludes with her first glimpse of Isaac as he meditated in the field at eventide. Subsequently, "Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her." How pictorial this is of our Lord and His chosen bride. Not only was Isaac the appointed seed of promise, but his bride was also to be specially selected. Through this pair, the line descended until we come to the greater Isaac, the ultimate seed of the promise to father Abraham. Paul explains in Gal 3:16 – "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one; And to thy seed, which is Christ." Further on, the apostle brings in the intimate association of the church of this gospel age in the fulfillment of the promise of blessing – "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus... and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:26-29)

Here the apostle speaks of the Lord's people as "heirs according to the promise", leading us into our text verse in Gal 4:28 – "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." The apostle furthermore speaks down the age to all who have heard the call to follow Jesus. Elsewhere, these are spoken of as being "in Christ", surely a most intimate relationship. It is abundantly clear that the church and its call is no "ad hoc" arrangement, but part of a great master plan going back at least as far as God's promise to Abraham so long ago. But Paul tells us that in fact it was predetermined even before that. Speaking of the church, he says – "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him (i.e. Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself (i.e. God), according to the good pleasure of His will." (Eph 1:3-5)

Here we see that it was God's long range plan and desire that there be a people for His name and for His purposes and that these were to be to the praise of His glorious grace, to which end He has made all such accepted not in their own righteousness, but in the "beloved". In parallel with this long term provision for the calling out of the church and surpassing it in glory is the provision of the Lamb of God, "slain from the foundation of the world" as we read in Rev 13:8. Peter also tells us of this preplanning – "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last days for you." (1 Pet 1:18-20) These two provisions find their focus in the promise to Abraham "in thee and in thy seed" as elucidated by Paul in Gal 3, already referred to.

THE MYSTERY

Paul also speaks of this calling out of a people for God's name as part of the mystery, or secret, of Christ "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel." Paul goes on to explain that the call of the church to be the holy bride for God's dear Son is an exhibition of His manifold wisdom, His multifaceted wisdom, and is part of His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph 3:5-11) The words "eternal purpose" in verse 11 are sometimes translated as "a plan of ages" and in this form have entered Bible Student usage. It points to the progressive nature of God's purposes but we need to remember that it is also an "eternal" purpose, conceived in the mind of a loving God, preached before to Abraham, centred in Jesus Christ and involving not only those who are children of promise but eventually to bless and uplift all mankind.

Returning to Isaac, we see in his life story many pointers as to the final fulfillment of the promise to his father Abraham. We see the long delayed -arrival of the foretold son and heir of promise, that he must be of free birth and that the selection of a fit bride for him was most important. In the greatest of all tests of Abraham's faith, we see God foreshadowing to him, in the offering up of Isaac, how the promise of blessing would ultimately be accomplished. Abraham's faith having been proved, Isaac was, of course, reprieved but the greater Isaac, the ultimate seed of promise had to go all the way to the cross, that He might be the

satisfaction for the sins of the church of this age and of all mankind in due time.

Apart from the great faith of Abraham, we see the willing obedience, even apparently unto death of the younger man, Isaac. We note his quiet patience as he awaits the return of his father's steward with the chosen bride. In turn, we see the willingness of Rebekah to go with the steward's party back to her future husband, her first glimpse of him and her becoming his wife. So much of this is reflected in the experience of the Lord's people of this gospel age, the age of the high calling of God in Christ. How fitting are the apostle's words using the analogy of husband and wife – "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph 5:25-27)

Psalm 45 presents a similar picture of the bridal preparation and entry in to her husband, the king. Many other scriptures have much precious material on this aspect and others of the high calling and its importance in the purposes of God, but keeping the lives of Isaac and Rebekah in mind, there are several points that particularly merit our attention. Just as a seed for Abraham and Sarah was foretold long before the event, so natural Israel and indeed all mankind had to wait long centuries for the coming of the greater Isaac. Heb 9:26 tells us – "Nor yet that He (Christ) should offer Himself often... for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the age hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." At the end of the year, we specially remember the birth of our dear Saviour, and in Gal 3:16, Paul explains that He is that promised seed of blessing, promised to Abraham so long ago.

THE CALL

We have already seen that the church, the chosen bride of Christ, was no afterthought to God's plan. Just as a considerable and well equipped entourage set off to seek out a bride for Isaac, being directed by Abraham to go direct to his own country of origin and to his own kindred, there to find the suitable maiden, so God has His own criteria for those whom He calls to be members of the Bride. We see this in John 6:44 – "No one can come to me (Christ), except the Father who hath sent me draw him." These His wisdom has foreknown and predestined and we see something of the criteria in our Lord's and the apostles' words, such as the beatitudes in Matt 5:3-11, and Paul's summation in 1 Cor 1:26,27 – "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things,... the weak things,... and base things of the world, and things which are despised,... and things which are not,... that no flesh should glory in His presence." Of His first such followers, our Lord said "Thine they were and Thou ga^yest them me, and they have kept Thy word."

Returning to Paul's words in Gal 3, we have already noted that our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly identified as the long promised seed of Abraham through whom the promise is to be fulfilled and that those who come into Christ are to be associated with Him in that grand work. So we see how these can truly be called "children of promise" as was Isaac. These are mostly not children of Abraham by natural descent as we read in John 1:11-13 – "He (Jesus) came unto His own, but His own received Him not; but as many as received Him gave He power to become the sons of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The apostle speaks of these as new creatures in Christ, a new creation, "children of promise."

In what way, then, would we say that the Lord's people of this age are "children of promise"? The passages in Gal 3 and John 1 already considered state clearly that these, as footstep followers of Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a seed, are privileged by faith to be also children of Abraham. As such, they have part and inheritance in the promised work of blessing of all mankind in due course. Rom 8:16,17 tells us that "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and 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." The provision of God's plan was one of the divine mysteries or secrets not clearly made known until after our Lord's death and resurrection but we can see now in the light of God's Word that it was always in His mind as part of the Abrahamic promise.

THE PRIVILEGE

What a humbling privilege it is even now and will be for all those whom our Heavenly Father finds faithful in this life of preparation and training! "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne." (Rev 3:21) How great are its present blessings, how important the trials and refining processes which God allows for our growth in grace and understanding! It is written of our Saviour that "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" and that through His experiences, being made like unto His brethren, He can be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. As children of promise, joint heirs with Him, we need to learn the same lessons in preparation for that "greater work above" which one of our hymns refers to.

Lest we be carried away with the grandeur of this call, the apostle makes it clear that it is only in Christ, by faith, that we become children of promise; it is only in Christ, by faith, that we are counted as Abraham's

seed and heirs according to that promise. The fact of this favoured position is discussed by Paul in Rom 9:7-9 which read –”Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed; for this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.” The words “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” are quoted from Gen 21:12, and it is only in the greater Isaac, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we are accepted in God’s sight. It is only if we belong to Christ, if we are truly His, that we are Abraham’s seed and heirs of the promise. “In Christ” – this is the theme of the Ephesian epistle and our only sure foundation.

But is this all? God foreknew and provided that there be a bride chosen to share with His dear Son in the fulfillment of the promise and this call of the bride has been going on for nearly 2000 years. Indeed, the invitation to accept Jesus as Saviour and resolve to follow in His steps of obedience and faithfulness is still open for those with ears to hear and hearts to obey. There is a cost, but not one that compares in any way with what He calls us to, in present joy and future service. Of our Lord it is written that “for the joy that was set before Him (He) endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2)

THE PROSPECT

So too it is for His followers, the children of promise; the joy set before them is not only to see Him as He is and be made like Him, but to be used along with Him and subject to Him in the great blessing work promised to father Abraham so long ago. For this work, they are called and chosen and are to be found faithful. In this work of the coming age, Abraham himself and the other faithful heroes of Heb 11 will surely have a part, but the Lord’s people of this age are to be a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that (they) should show forth the praises of Him who hath called (them) out of darkness into His marvellous light.” (1 Pet 2:9) In that age to come, they will not be called to sacrifice but to rule and bless all mankind under their great King of Kings and High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec.

In 1 Cor 6:2, we read that the saints, the children of promise, are to judge the world. We recall that the role of the judges in Israel was much to do with instruction and guidance and Isaiah assures us that “when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world shall learn righteousness.” (Isa 26:9) The New Testament confirms this role of the Church, but for much of the detail, we need to refer to the Old Testament prophets. Peter declares that all of these spoke of times of restitution or restoration which would follow the return of our Lord. The program is set out for us in that very familiar passage in Acts 15:14-18, the first step being the calling out of a people for God’s name and the final outcome the residue of mankind being blessed as they seek after the Lord.

In such manner, the orderly procession of God’s plans and purposes as first clearly spoken to Abraham – “in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed” – is to be carried out, and the Lord’s people, “Children of promise” like Isaac, are to have a privileged part with their dear Lord and the faithful ones of old times in that work of blessing.

IMPORTANCE OF THE HIGH CALLING

When we think of the favour extended to frail men and women of this age in the calling of God to be His sons and daughters by Christ Jesus, when we recognise how blessed we are even here and now, when we acknowledge how much greater will be the privilege of service and blessing to others in the age to come; how earnestly we need to consider the apostle’s words – “I beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling wherewith you are called.” May your resolve and mine for this and each new year be “by Thy grace we will!”

Amen

I am the True Vine

The discourse recorded in John 15:1-11 was spoken by Jesus on the night in which he instituted the memorial of his death. It may have been told to his disciples in the Upper Room or on the way to the Mount of Olives. In it we have brought before our minds the husbandman, the vine, the branches and the fruit. This is a good illustration, as any orchard or vineyard first needs a good husbandman to direct the work, so that the most profit can be gained from a ripe crop of fruit. Jesus says that His Father is the husbandman. Here we understand that our Heavenly Father is the one who has the care and interest of all His people who are called to be His children, during this present age.

ABIDING

Jesus also says (v1) that He is the vine, the main trunk of the tree, and no life can flow out to the branches of a tree without this means of supply. So Jesus is the source of supply or the means by which the church, branches in the vine, are fed and nourished. This teaches us a lesson that is evident right through the New Testament, that God is the Father of the Church. Jesus further explained that “no man can come to Him except the Father which sent me draw him.” (John 6:44). After being drawn to Jesus we can only become children of God our Father through accepting Jesus as our Saviour as Paul writes, “being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 5:1)

The branches of the vine can only maintain life if they receive the source of life, and this is illustrated by the sap which flows or is drawn from the nourishment in the earth by the roots through the main vine to the branches and eventually to the fruit. The sap represents the Holy Spirit of God which must flow through Jesus to every member of the Church. Thus we become children of God, as we read in Rom. 8:14 "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the Sons of God". So Jesus says in Verse 2, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." The Lord wishes to see some progress being made after we are called to be branches in the vine. This is also made clear to us in the parable of the Sower in Luke 8:415. Some of the seed fell on unproductive ground and did not bring forth fruit to perfection. But the seed which fell on good ground pictures they who have an honest and good heart and having heard the word bring forth fruit with patience.

PRUNING

Jesus further tells us in Verse 2, that each branch that brings forth fruit needs pruning if it is going to bear more fruit. This is done by the husbandman –the one that has the care of the vineyard. He nurtures it, trims it, keeps it clean and has a deep interest in its growth, and ultimately in its quality of fruit. So our Heavenly Father has this same interest in us, His children. The pruning hand of our Father is shown in the lives of His children by the various experiences of life that are designed to draw us nearer to Him, and to depend entirely on the vine, our Lord Jesus. Jesus knew that within a few hours his disciples would go through a very harrowing experience. The Shepherd would be smitten and the sheep scattered.

The value of these illustrations of Jesus would be of greater assistance to his disciples after Pentecost. John 14:20 reads, "at that day, ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." John 14:29 – "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe." No doubt then the Apostles would see the Father's hand in their experiences after Pentecost, when they were dealt with so severely because of the hatred of the Jewish faction who took the life of Jesus.

It has been the same for all the Lord's people right down the Gospel age as the Apostle Paul says in Heb. 12:5-7, "My son despise not the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" So our Father purifies all His children so that they may be more useful to Him. He takes away things that hinder their usefulness and makes them more useful in motive and life.

Verse 4 continues "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." This verse speaks of being united in Jesus. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 12:12, "For as the body is one and hath many members and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." There we see the same thought –that we are individuals but united through Christ. This is brought to our attention in other Scriptures. Eph. 2:19-20 reads, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

FRUITAGE

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20) All these Scriptures point out that we are entirely dependant on the need to abide in Jesus. No fruit can be borne unless we continue to have the spirit of Jesus in our hearts. Whenever we meet together with members of the true vine, we do so because of Jesus' love for us and our love for Him. 2 Cor 5:14 says "For the love of Christ constraineth us;" ie – holds us together. Thus we find that by meeting together with the Lord's people we are assisted in the development of fruit. Verse 5 reads, "I am the vine ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing." We notice here that much fruit is the product of our abiding in Christ and Christ in us. If this be so, fruit is certain.

To quote from another writer – "Have you ever noticed the difference in Christian life between work and fruit? A machine can do work: only life can bear fruit. A law can compel work: only love can spontaneously bring forth fruit. Work implies effort and labour: – the essential idea of fruit is that it is the silent, natural, restful produce of our inner life. The gardener may labour to give his fruit tree the digging, the watering, the manuring, dressing and pruning it needs; but he can do nothing to produce the fruit. So in the Christian life – the fruit of the Spirit is "Love, joy, peace." The healthy life bears much fruit. The connection between work and fruit is perhaps best seen in the expression, "fruitful in every good work." (Col 1:10)

It is only when good works come as the fruit of the indwelling spirit that they are acceptable to God. Under the compulsion of law and conscience, or the influence of inclination and zeal, people may be most diligent in good works, and yet find that they have but little spiritual result.

There can be no reason but this – their works are human efforts, instead of being the fruit of the Spirit, the restful, natural outcome of the Holy Spirit operating within us."

Fruit takes time to grow and so does the fruit of the Spirit. First of all there is the flower, then the tiny fruit begins to grow. Then the fruit is green and sour, but all through the growing season it is necessary to abide in the vine until the ripe fruit is developed to the satisfaction of the husbandman.

In our passage, Verse 7 suggests the need of prayer, and again we are reminded that we are dependent on the vine. We cannot make progress in the Christian way, in our own strength. So we must continually ask for a supply of the Holy Spirit so that we may develop continually the fruits of the Spirit. We also note that Jesus said "If my words abide in you." It is not only necessary that we seek divine grace by keeping contact with our Heavenly Father in prayer, but that we take note of what God's will is for us, through His word of truth. Those who abide in Christ do not do their own will. Jesus said that he sought always to do the will of his Father and those who abide in Christ must likewise do the Father's will.

Psalm 40 is a prophecy of our Lord Jesus. Verse 6 says that God was not depending on the sacrifice of animals to take away sin, but it would be found in the sacrifice of Jesus. Verse 7 says, "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." This is confirmed in Heb 10:5-10, where Paul refers this Psalm directly to Jesus and in verse 10, Paul says that we, the Church, are sanctified by doing the Father's will, as Jesus did, laying our sacrifice on the altar along with our Lord's. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.

We get a further idea of the importance of the words of Jesus abiding in us from our Lord's prayer in John 17: 14-17 – indeed this prayer of Jesus to his Father shows us the importance of prayer and communion with Him. Reading from Verse 14, "I have given them thy word: and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

"MUCH FRUIT"

John 15 continues in Verse 8 – "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." Here we see the outcome of the abiding in the vine, of abiding in Christ i.e. the fruitage – much fruit; that glorifies the Father, that honours the Father. Here we should note 1 Pet 4:11, which says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever". It is good to remind ourselves of the importance of the words – let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.

This is a reminder again of our need for humility; not attempting anything in our own strength, but depending on our abiding in the true vine. If this is so, "so shall ye be my disciples" (So shall we honour God) Verse 9 continues, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love", ie. abide in my love. This verse is heart searching! Can we really comprehend the Father's love for our Lord Jesus? We can in some way by realizing that it was because of his obedience to the Father that his love was shown to him in such great measure.

What a wonderful thought this is that Jesus has toward us the same kind of love that the Father has toward him. It is only by faith that we can grasp this thought and maintain this standing with Jesus. As his disciples we will desire to continue in his love always, endeavouring to look to him as our exemplar in obedience to his Father's will, for it was our Lord's obedience to His Father that showed his love for Him. 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" – not irksome, not difficult to keep, if in our hearts the desire is to serve Him.

Verse 11, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." The things Jesus refers to here are the lessons from the vine and the branches. If these things remain or abide in you, my joy will abide in you and your joy will be complete. As mentioned earlier the Apostles would experience the full benefit of this parable after Pentecost, when they would be filled with the Holy Spirit. "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." (John 16:22)

Paul records in Heb 12:2, that it was because of the joy that was set before Him that Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. This same joy was experienced by the Apostles after Pentecost, when they went forward with the gospel to all who could hear the message. And so it has been with all the followers of Jesus. The telling of the Gospel brings joy to our hearts just as it did to the Lord and His Apostles. (JBH)

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love another. (John 15:16,17)

Convention Reflections — Melbourne — New Year 2000/1

The Melbourne Convention provided those able to attend with much spiritual food and warm fellowship with others of like mind. It was an excellent way to start a new year, a new millennium by our calendar, which will bring many challenges for all of us, from the youngest in years or length of time following our Lord, to those who have been in the "way" for many decades. We were blessed to have Bro. Bob and Sis. Deanna Gorecki, also Sis Nancy Brown, from USA and Sis Joanna Gowryluk from Canada with us.

We went on an interesting journey over the three days of convention. We considered the Lord's people as Children of Promise and the many promises to Abraham's seed given to them. We were then taken through the Iron Gate into the prison where Peter was held and noted the lessons we can learn from his experience and those of his brethren and God's workings in His people's lives. We looked at the meaning of Humility in the Bible and how it should develop in our character. With Predestination, we saw how God deals with many different people to fulfil His plans for mankind, without taking away their free will.

We looked into the four great attributes of God's character – Power, Wisdom, Justice and Love – and how all these had to meet if God's plan for the salvation of mankind was to come about and how all these attributes were demonstrated in His beloved son, our Saviour. Along with the addresses and studies, we received messages from brothers and sisters from interstate and overseas and were able to join in praising our Heavenly Father in many of the hymns we have come to love as well as some that we are not so familiar with.

We looked at the Importance of the Call of the Church and its work now and in the future. We were told to go for Gold, and how the Christian walk is likened to the ancient Grecian games. Then we had a history lesson on Jerusalem, the City of Peace, after which we looked into "Her" Perfect Work, the fact that faith, hope and works are intertwined as requirements for Church members. At this time of year, the Christian world looks to Bethlehem and the birth of our Lord without realising its full significance and how it fits in with God's plan to provide a Saviour for all mankind.

We participated in two Bible studies. We saw the warning given to the Thessalonians about the problems that lay ahead during the day of preparation and the need for us all to arm ourselves by putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. We took a journey with the Shepherd King David and saw how he viewed Jehovah as the Great Shepherd who leads on the narrow way, not always through green pastures but at times through the valley of the shadow of death.

New Year's Eve was spent with the Polish brethren and we were reminded in song and prose from the children of what blessings our Heavenly Father has bestowed upon us. It has been said that "we do not always get what we want, but our Heavenly Father gives us what we need!" We were lead (by Bro Bob) through a reflective look over the end of the millennium and the need to consider how we have served our Heavenly Father.

We took time to look at the promises of restitution spoken of by all God's holy prophets, then we took a building course on the building of God's temple and how we are to be parts of that holy temple. A reminder was given of the need for a spirit towards others of forgiving and forgetting, even as God has for Christ's sake forgiven us. The Convention closed with the singing of "Blest be the Tie that Binds: and "Lord, Dismiss us with Thy Blessing" and a final prayer.

The Glory of God

The personal glory of the Creator is quite beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend. However, we can understand to some extent the glorious virtues of his character. We might say that God's infinite wisdom, his unyielding justice, his boundless love, and his almighty power, being in perfect balance as they are, together reveal his glory.

Enlightened Christians can now comprehend God's glory through an understanding of his plan for the redemption and recovery of the human race from death. But the world in general does not possess this knowledge and therefore does not now "see" the glory of God. The understanding which will enable the world of mankind to comprehend the glory of God's character will be given during the thousand-year reign of Christ. Then the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth, and as a result "all flesh" will discern the glory of God. Isaiah wrote, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." - Isa. 40:5

The whole world will then know of God's justice as represented in the divine penalty for sin. They will know how divine wisdom found the way whereby God could be just, yet release the condemned world from death. Paul explained it this way: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." - Rom. 3:23-26

During the millennial reign of Christ the world will learn that it was divine love that provided the Redeemer, who himself lovingly died for their sins. The world will also then discern - even better than we are able to comprehend at the present time - the miracle-working power of God; for they will see it demonstrated in the resurrection of the dead. Since all the dead from every part of the earth eventually are to be awakened from death, the glory of God will indeed then fill the earth. - Acts 24:15

The glory of God was reflected to a limited degree in our first parents, whom he created in his image, crowned with glory and honour. (Gen. 1:27; Ps.8:4,5) As a result of the reign of sin and death man has lost

much of his original perfection, although there are many degrees of the divine qualities of justice, sympathy, and love to be found in many persons even now.

During the Gospel Age God has been inviting a small company of people to come out from the world, offering them the privilege of striving, through the exercise of faith, for a change of nature, from the human to the divine. (2 Pet. 1:4) Those who, in the resurrection, reach this high position will attain also unto the divine glory.

All who do not attain to spiritual glory in the resurrection will have the opportunity of being restored to human perfection. And think what a change that will be! It will be a progressive return to holiness, or perfection, which the Bible likens to travelling over a "highway." (Isa. 35:8)

It is the return road from death which Isaiah described when he wrote, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." - Isa. 35:10

All mankind who have been ransomed by Jesus will return from the sleep of the death. If they then accept the provisions of divine love through Christ, and obey the laws of his kingdom, they will obtain eternal joy and gladness; and sorrow, sickness, and death will be no more. - Rev. 21:4

The Bible assures us that then all will acclaim the glory of God, and the glory of his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, the "Lamb" which was slain to take away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) The people will then sing that inspiring song recorded in Revelation 15:3,4: "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgements have been revealed."

- Revised Standard Version

(From The Dawn)

Thy Word is True

(PSA. 119:160)

The history of the Bible, with all its striking facts, furnishes a broad tributary stream to swell the tide of evidence. The history of its composition, the history of its preservation; the history of its translation from tongue to tongue; the history of its circulation throughout earth's wide domain - in a word, its entire history "surpassing fable, and yet true" - forms a powerful argument in defence of its divine origin.

Rest in the Lord

(PSA. 37:7)

Stay still in the hand of the Potter,
Lie low 'neath His wonderful touch.
He shapeth and mouldeth in mercy
The clay that He loveth so much.
Surrender thyself to His working
The curve and the hollow He wills,
Nor shrink from the pain and the pressure
For the vessel He fashions, He fills!

Watch & Pray

Mark 13:33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is (KJV)

It is interesting to note that the passage from 'which the text is taken was spoken by Jesus to four of the Apostles as we are told in Mark 13:3 "And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately," This was one of Jesus' last sermons before his death. The setting was that of the disciples admiring the temple and our Lord remarking in Mark 13:2. "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down".

Our Lord's sermon to the four disciples covered the following aspects:

1. The rise of deceivers (vv 5,6)
2. The wars of the nations (vv 7,8)
3. The persecution of Christians (vv9-13)
4. The destruction of Jerusalem (vv 14-23)
5. The end of the world (age) (vv 24-27)

At the end of the sermon our Lord gave some general intimation concerning the timing of these events (vv. 28-32) as well as some practical suggestions for us on how we are to conduct ourselves and how to prepare for these happenings. (vv 33-37) The intention is to deal with the admonitions and lessons of these final five verses.

TAKE HEED

Mark 13:33-37 “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch”.

It is interesting to note that the words “take heed” appear four times during the sermon.

1. Lest anyone deceive you (v5)
2. To yourselves, what you say and do (v9)
3. To what I have told you (v23)
4. To watch and pray (v33)

The words ‘take heed’ came from the Greek word **blepo-991**, which has the meaning of

1. To see, to discern (used of the bodily eye), to discover by use, to know by experience

2. Metaphorically, to see with the mind’s eye

- To have the power of understanding
- To discern mentally
- To turn the thoughts or direct the mind to a thing, to consider,
- To contemplate, to look at, to weigh carefully, to examine

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words gives us the following explanation “to look,” see, usually implying more especially an intent, earnest contemplation.

The urging of our Lord to “take heed” means that we have to earnestly contemplate and learn from our experiences of life, not to become complacent or indifferent to the signs that are around us. This is quite often easier said than done as we all lead very busy lives and each year seems to go faster than the one before. We can easily become distracted and miss important signs that are around us. We can become so absorbed in day to day life that we do not take time to contemplate God’s time clock.

WATCH

We are told in verse 33 to ‘watch’. The word in the Greek had a greater meaning than the English word ‘to watch’. The word is agrupneo 69, “to be sleepless” (from agreuo, “to chase,” and hupnos, “sleep”), and is used metaphorically, “to be watchful,” as in Eph 6:17-18 “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” The word expresses not mere wakefulness, but the “watchfulness” of those who are intent upon a thing.

The best experience of the meaning of the word that most of us have had of ‘to be sleepless’ is the first night that we stay in a strange place. We are alert to every different sound, movement and smell around us. It is all new to us, so our awareness is heightened, we are on guard, noticing every sound and change of light around us, nothing escapes our notice but after a few nights we get used to the sounds and movements and let down our guard and relax. However our Lord has instructed us in this passage that we are to be watchful with intent, looking for the signs of His presence and the time of the end.

The example in Ephesians brings out the thought of soldiers on watch. They are on guard defending the rest of the troops while they sleep. They must be alert to notice any noise or movement that may mean an attack is imminent. To fall asleep on duty during Roman times often meant severe punishment or, even death to the soldier who was on duty. We too should be like soldiers on watch, with everything that we need with us. This includes:-

- The helmet of salvation, or hope, which has salvation for its object; the helmet secures the head. Such a good hope of salvation is well founded and well built on intellectual knowledge based not upon things that are seen, but upon things that are unseen. We have to accept Christ’s atoning work, realising that by ourselves we can do nothing. One has commented that the helmet was so that we could not get a swelled head.

- The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The sword is a very necessary and useful part of a soldier’s equipment. But like a good soldier we must practice with our weapon, the word of God, until we have a good knowledge of it and of how we can use it to defend ourselves. Scripture-arguments are the most powerful arguments to repel temptation. Christ himself resisted each of Satan’s temptations with the words, “It is written”, (Mt. 4:4,7,10). The Psalmist wrote in Ps 119:11 “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee”. So we can see the importance of the sword of the spirit.

- Fellowship with the Brethren. It is much easier to watch if we have others with us helping us to watch. The fellowship of the Brethren helps us during the hard times, we are able to encourage each other. It is said that ‘the more eyes watching the more you will see’. As we are told in Heb 10:22-25 “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our

bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Each of us will notice different things, and by combining our observations we can gain a clearer picture of the signs of the times. All of us have our strong points where we are able to encourage other brethren, and we all have our weak points where we need the help of other brethren. The Bible and the various other helps that we have are like the manual issued to soldiers, giving us an insight into God's plan and indicating the signs that give us clues to where we are on the plan of the ages.

PRAY

With the command to watch also comes the command to pray. We constantly need to be in contact with our Heavenly Father as it is from this source that we gain strength to go on this Journey in the Narrow Way. It is only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit sent from the Heavenly Father that we will be able to understand the scriptures. We use prayer when we are down and need encouragement to continue, we need prayer when we do not know how to help others who are going through difficult times, and of course we use prayer to praise and honour our Heavenly Father, as well as to thank Him for the many blessings that we receive. However in this verse the prayer is special. It is the prayer we need to gain the strength to watch, to be on our guard. Watching can be very lonely and we can easily be discouraged by the length of time we are watching when nothing seems to be happening, and so we have to go to our Heavenly Father in prayer for the strength to continue on in the narrow way.

The last part of our verse gives emphasis to the reason for watching and praying 'for ye know not when the time is' as we are told in verse 32 'But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.' Our Heavenly Father had good reasons not to announce this date to us. If the date were known to us, then Satan who also knew the scriptures would also know. Can we imagine the effect of knowing that the date was 2000 years hence would have had on the first of the followers of our Lord? 2000 years would have been unimaginable to them; it may have so disheartened them that they may have fallen away. The watching and the setting of dates have often acted as a sieve in separating the faithful especially during the last 130 years.

No doubt, our Lord knew the date after He ascended to heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father, and we have been given signs to indicate that that day is not far from us. For some of us, if we knew the exact date, we might be tempted to put off walking in the narrow way. We could feel we had time for other pleasures, other distractions, and with time on our hands could wait to start the journey. We have examples in every day life where when we know the date of certain events we tend to put off preparing for exams or study or talks to the last minute sure that we have time, but how often are we caught out with insufficient time to properly finish the task. This walk of faith needs only to know that "God knows the date" and has it all in hand, this is but one of the tests that God has given us.

Our Lord in the next few verses uses a parable or story that was familiar to the disciples to explain the meaning of the information and instructions he had left them Mark 13:34-37 "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping."

Our Master has gone away, and left us something in trust, in charge, which we must give account of at His return. He is as a man taking a far journey; for He is to be away a great while, He has left His house on earth, and left His servants in their offices, given authority to some, who are to be overseers, and work to others, who are to be labourers. And when He took His last leave, He appointed the porter to watch, to be sure to be ready to open to Him at His return; and in the meantime to take care to whom he opened his gates, not to thieves and robbers, but only to his Master's friends and servants.

The Porter was a keeper of the door. This person guarded the entrance to a city, public building, the temple, rich man's house or the sheepfold as we're told in the story of the Good Shepherd in John 10:2-3 "But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out". A guard was stationed at any entrance through which someone unwanted might enter, especially at night. This must have been a lowly job because of the contrast implied in Psalm 84:10; "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness". The "doorkeeper" is the opposite of the most luxurious and favourable position. Porters were also called gatekeepers.

Thus our Lord Jesus, when he ascended on high left something for all his servants to do, expecting they should all do him service in his absence, and be ready to receive him at his return. All are appointed to work, to watch and to pray. We ought to be always upon our watch, in expectation of His return, Mark 13:35. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning": Our Lord will come, and will come as the Master of the house, to take

account of His servants, of their work, and of the progress they have made.

PREPARED

We know not when He will come for each one of us; and He has very wisely kept us in uncertainty, that we might all be always ready. We know not when He will come, just at what precise time the Master of the house perhaps will come – at even, at nine at night; or it may be at midnight, or at cockcrowing, at three in the morning, or perhaps not until six. Our present life is a night, a dark night, compared with the life everlasting that has been promised to those who are faithful; we know not in which watch of the night our Master will come, whether in the days of youth, or middle age, or old age.

Our great care must be, that, whenever our Lord comes, He shall not find us sleeping, secure in ourselves, off our guard, indulging ourselves in ease and sloth, mindless of our work and duty, and thoughtless of our Lord's coming, ready to say, He will not come yet, and be unprepared to meet him. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is an example of not being prepared for the long wait and not ready when the Master arrives.

He will indeed come suddenly and it will be a great surprise and terror to those that are careless, and asleep, it will come upon them as a thief in the night. Paul exhorts us in 1 Thes 5:2-6; “for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober”. As children of light we may not know the exact hour, but we should be aware of the signs of the times and ever more watchful for our Master.

In Verse 37 we are told “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch”. Our Lord repeats the point again that we are to watch or be prepared, having completed all the tasks set for us, knowing what our Lord wants of us, so that we can be ready as Peter tells us in 2 Pet 3:12-14 “Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”.

Is this watching worth the trouble, the effort that it takes? Yes, as Paul speaking to the Corinthians tells us in 1 Cor 2:9 “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”. The Psalmist tells us in Ps 31:19 “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! We have the promise “that he will never leave us or forsake us” and that our Lord “has gone to prepare a place for us” Paul further on in 1 Cor 2:10 tells us that “God hath revealed them (the things which He has prepared) unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”.

Although we do not have all the details of what our Heavenly Father has in store for us, we know that it will be beyond our wildest imagination, the waiting will have been worthwhile when we hear “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (:00/01).

In order that we may follow in His footsteps and become living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service, our Lord provides the right paths which are advantageous to our development in righteousness. These paths are not always easy, they can be difficult and trying. How fortunate are we that our Master has trod the pathway before us, so He knows of the difficulties, the dangers, the snares, the pitfalls by the way, so that we are not tried beyond our capabilities. He leads us not contrary to our wills but in harmony therewith, to prove what is good, next the acceptable, and finally the perfect will of God, as Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 “Be not conformed to the world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

“YEA, THOU I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME.”

The whole of mankind is walking through this valley of death as the result of the sin of father Adam, living with the daily prospect of death. Adam had fallen from the mountain top of life, he lost his footing there and descended into the valley of the shadow of death. Mankind as a whole fear this valley as they can see no way of escape. Scientists have for years been trying to find the key to increasing our life span, looking for the fountain of youth, even to deep freezing of the human body in the hope one day of finding the secret to eternal life. Mankind’s journey through this valley is one of sickness, pain, sorrow, culminating in death. As the Apostle Paul states-Romans 8:22,19 “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now .. waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.” The world is yet to realise that only through Christ and his Church during the Millennial Age can they be lifted out of the “valley of the shadow of death”, back to the heights of light, love and Divine likeness.

The sheep however that hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow his directions, although still in the world, walking through this valley, learn to be neither careless nor anxious as they walk. Fear and tremblings, doubts and perplexities are replaced with the realisation that God through his Son has provided a way out of the valley of the shadow of death” He has assured us that death shall not mean extinction of life, but merely, until the resurrection, an undisturbed sleep in Jesus. As we are told in 1 Cor 15:55 “0 death, where is thy sting? 0 grave, where is thy victory?” No wonder then that the world looks upon these sheep with amazement as they pass through this valley singing, and rendering praise unto the Lord. They surely “fear no evil” as their shepherd has promised “I will never leave thee or forsake thee”

“Thy Rod and Thy Staff they comfort me” tells us of the ways in which God looks after us as we walk. The Shepherd’s crook or staff was used to assist the sheep out of difficulties, to defend it from its too powerful enemies and to chasten it when inattentive. The word staff means “a support, a stay.” The rod was also used to count the sheep to make sure all were present. How glad we are to know that all power in heaven and in earth is committed unto our Shepherd and that under both his protecting and correcting care we are safe from all foes, and nothing can by any means do us harm.

“THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES”

The figure of the shepherd caring for his sheep is still before us in this verse, and it serves to illustrate the love and care of the Great Heavenly Shepherd for His people. A very important part of the Eastern shepherd’s duties would be that of preparing a suitable pasture for the sheep under his care. Not only must he find a supply of water, and plenty of the right kind of grass for the sheep, but he must also prepare the pasture in the sense of driving off the wild animals and reptiles which may be lurking around. The shepherd walking ahead of his sheep would be able to note any poisonous grasses and avoid such places; also the presence of snakes would be detected; and wolves and hyenas would need to be guarded against. How true of the Good Shepherd who provides the food for His trusting ones, but sees to it that no poisonous elements shall get into it. He sees to it that they are not injured thereby. The Good Shepherd has spread a table for his trusting sheep in this time in the very presence of enemies, but we need to listen and thus keep ourselves in his love and care, by earnest efforts to know and do his will.

“THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL, MY CUP RUNNETH OVER”

Throughout the Psalm, the leading thought is that of the Lord’s love and care and interest in His people, illustrated by the figure of a shepherd caring for his sheep. The Psalm has sung the whole round of the day’s wandering—all the needs of the sheep, all the care of the Shepherd. Now we close with the final scene of the day. At the door of the sheepfold the shepherd stands, and he carefully inspects each sheep as they pass one by one before him into the fold. He has the horn filled with olive-oil and he has at hand a supply of Cedar-tar, and he anoints a knee bruised on the rocks, or a side scratched by thorns. If one is simply worn out and exhausted, he bathes its face and head in the refreshing olive-oil; he takes the large two-handled cup and dips it brimming full from the water he has brought for that purpose, and he lets the weary sheep drink. There is nothing finer in the Psalm than this. God’s care is not for the wounded only; it is for those who are just worn and weary, to the point that we can say his mercies and goodness are such that our Cup overflows, all our needs are fully

supplied.

“SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE”

These words seem to indicate the ending of the day’s experiences, a realisation that the Shepherd’s care has lead them safely through another day, and the feeling that while we too are under his watchful eye and obey his commands, we have safety and peace. The sheep have all been led home and are safely sheltered in the fold. David in reflection could see the pictures of his childhood experiences associated with the watching over of his father’s sheep, and how these reflected the care Jehovah had shown him as he led him from his position as shepherd boy, through divine intervention, to become King of Israel and to grow old in service to his people and to Jehovah. His life had been a combination of various scenes, experiences both joyful and sorrowful. As he looked back over the long years of his earthly pilgrimage, memories of his life as a shepherd came to mind inspiring him to use these experiences, in caring for his sheep, to create this beautiful song telling of his own life of faith and trust in God.

The roles have been reversed, he no longer thinks of himself as the Shepherd, responsible for all the sheep’s needs, but as one of the lowly sheep requiring the protection of the Great Shepherd, Jehovah. He tries to peer into the dim unknown future with a confidence brought about by a long experience. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the (remaining) days of my life.” Only one who had experience of trials and adversities, as well as the blessings that inevitably come in this life on earth, one who had come to realise the need of divine mercy and grace, could have written these words. These words describe the experience of learning good by coming in contact with evil, even at times being overcome by evil, realising that amid the scenes of human life, the only power to deliver us from evil comes through the goodness and mercy of the Lord.

The power to bless, to heal, to work deliverance, is expressed in the Psalm as coming not from man but from God, Every verse covers some aspect of God’s dealings with those who put their trust in him. David firmly believed that Jehovah was deeply involved in every aspect of his life, that He was full of compassion for him, remembering him in his weakened fallen nature.

Who can define goodness? Applying goodness to man and his dealings with his fellow man is difficult, nearly impossible, to sum up in one word, but God’s goodness to imperfect ones who fear and reverence Him is not measureable. His benevolence of heart is manifested in His gifts of grace, and his discipline.

Mercy is defined as that benevolence, mildness, tenderness, which disposes a person to overlook injuries or to treat an offender better than he deserves. It is the disposition that tempers justice and induces an injured person to forgive trespasses and injuries and to forbear punishment, or to inflict less than the law or justice will warrant. It is said that no word in our language precisely fits the meaning of mercy.

“AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER”.

The shepherd’s song is finished, the sheep are all at rest, safe in the good shepherd’s fold, home at last.

To dwell in the house of the Lord forever will require a change. We have but temporary abode on earth waiting as strangers for our calling home to be with our Master in the Heavenly mansions or abodes, as some translate the word. This is the promise of Christ when He went away to prepare a place for his disciples. We can only imagine the joy that is set before us when we can dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We realise more and more as we look back over the way, that He has been with us all the way during the sunny, days, cloudy days, days of joy, days of sorrow, days of trial, days of toil and days of weariness. Along with David we can say that surely goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives and we look forward to dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

RC: 1992

Crucified & Risen

“Jesus our Lord Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification” Rom. 4:25.

“IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME”

At this time of the year, our thoughts turn particularly to those momentous events in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago.

There it was that our dear Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, He who was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners was cruelly put to death upon a Roman cross. There He suffered and died, “the just for the unjust”; there all the various types and prophecies of the Old Testament found their fulfilment in that One whom John the Baptist had earlier announced as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”.

So at this season, in remembrance of Him, Jesus our Saviour and Lord, we keep that simple Memorial service which He Himself instituted in that upper room, so long ago. We see again in the elements the giving of

His life, the shedding of His blood, ultimately for the blessing of all mankind, but here and now for all those who have ears to hear His loving “follow me.” Again we take to ourselves the merit of His blood and feast on Him who is the Bread of Life. We recall our privilege of following in His footsteps, to be dead with Him, of fellowship with Him in lives of obedience and sacrifice, and we renew our vows of consecration to His service.

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death, till He come.” 1 Cor. 11:26. May each dear child of God be richly blessed as once again we heed His loving words. “This do in remembrance of me.”

“HE IS RISEN”

But how thankful we are that the story does not end at the cross. Praise God, we serve a risen Saviour, and once more we can rejoice as we read the words of the angelic messengers to the two Marys who had gone so early on the first day of the week to the tomb where Jesus had been laid. “He is not here, He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and go quickly, and tell His disciples.” Matt. 28:6,7. The account goes on to tell that the two women departed quickly with fear (awe) and great joy and ran to tell the disciples. What joyous, awesome news indeed!

The resurrection of Jesus is truly the key to all the hopes of the Lord’s people, as so beautifully reasoned out by the apostle Paul in the great resurrection Chapter 1 Cor. 15. Our Lord’s own words to His disciples, in His tender last-night discourses recorded by John, might well be thought of as a “text” for the apostle’s masterly exposition. Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more, but ye see me; *because I live, ye shall live also.*” John 14:19.

The well-attested fact of Christ’s resurrection is, furthermore, the assurance of the resurrection in due time and order of all mankind; firstly, the faithful followers of Jesus of this age in the “first” resurrection (Rev. 20:6), then the faithful servants of God of old times in that “better” resurrection, for which they looked (Heb. 11:35), and, finally, the remainder of mankind in the resurrection to judgement. John 5:29.

Well may we marvel at the fullness and the comprehensiveness of God’s love and wisdom, as seen in His plans and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” Rom. 11:33.

Note: It is planned to include the address “Resurrection for All” in our next issue.

Master, Speak!

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for the voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee;
What hast Thou to say to me.

Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me.
Speak that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free.
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the Rock.

Master, speak, and make me ready,
When Thy Voice is truly heard,
With obedience, glad and steady