

The Joy Set Before Us

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—Hebrews 12:2*

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, THE Apostle Paul points to Jesus, who walked in a very narrow and difficult way during his earthly ministry. This is also true of those who faithfully follow him during this present Gospel Age. There are trials and besetments on every hand, and we are cautioned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”—I Pet. 5:8

GOD’S PROMISES

Although Satan is ever searching for ways to discourage us, the Heavenly Father in his great love has provided us with the encouragement that we need. By the ear of faith, his “little ones” hear the reassuring promises of God to protect and keep them in the narrow way and under the shadow of his wings.—Matt. 18:10

Jesus was constantly confronted with circumstances which could have discouraged him, but the promises of God lifted him above the trials that were part of his work of sacrifice. Shame and ignominy were heaped upon him, especially as it pertained to his trial and crucifixion. Through these trials, Jesus experienced a compensating joy of anticipation—"the joy that was set before him."

Jesus did not serve his Heavenly Father in order to obtain a reward, and neither should we. Yet, the promises of God assuring Jesus of a reward were a great source of strength to him, and enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. Paul says that Jesus is now "set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This was foretold in the promise recorded by the Psalmist David. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hebrew *sheol*, the grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:10,11) That joy is also set before us. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." (Rev. 3:21) Like Jesus, we realize the joy that awaits us when we have finished our consecrated course. This is a great encouragement when the trials are severe.

THE PROMISED SEED

In addition to the joy of spending eternity with his Heavenly Father, was Jesus' great anticipation of the joy of restoring the dead world of mankind to

life during his future kingdom. This was another incentive to faithfulness which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame and ignominy that he endured as he was laying down his life for the sins of the world. This joy is also set before us because we are promised to share in the promised “seed” of Abraham. The Apostle Paul explained, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (vss. 26-29) Paul admonishes, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9

MOUNT ZION

Zion is one of the symbols of the spiritual phase of Christ’s future kingdom in which we are promised a share. Our association with Jesus and Mount Zion is shown in Revelation, where we read, “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new

song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”—Rev 14:1-4

During the thousand years of Christ’s future kingdom, the entire dead world of mankind will be awakened from the sleep of death. The Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning God’s plan for their recovery. “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

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul said, “Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.” (Heb. 12:22) This wonderful symbol emphasizes the glory of the bride of Christ, the Lamb’s wife.

Mount Zion was a hill in ancient Jerusalem, therefore both of these symbolisms blend into one. We are thus assured that if we are faithful we will participate with Jesus in that glorious kingdom, in the light of which all mankind will walk and be blessed. What an incentive this should be to continue following the Lamb and to endure the cross daily as we are crucified with Christ.

THE ANGELS

The “innumerable company of angels” is a reference to those marvelous spirit beings who serve the followers of Jesus as guardian angels. Paul mentions them again in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. “Of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” (Heb. 1:7) “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”—vs.14

Speaking of the angels, Jesus said, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10) In this instance, Jesus used the expression, “their angels” which indicates the angels who minister to God’s little ones. The angels ministered to Jesus when he was in Gethsemane, and he said to Peter, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”—Matt. 26:53

It is evident that one or more of these holy, invisible ministers are constantly at work in shaping divine providences for the best spiritual interests of all those who are followers of the Lamb. How marvelous it will be, when exalted to the divine nature, to see and fellowship with those who have had so much to do in guiding and helping us as we walked in the narrow way of sacrifice.

There are many experiences in the life of every Christian, including times of great trial and moments of joy. At times, the trials may threaten to overwhelm us, and our loving Heavenly Father seems to hide his face. Through tears, we may look

up to him in prayer. Then, in his due time when he sees we have learned the needed lesson, the darkness scatters and, once more, we realize his promised grace to help in every time of need. The angels who always behold the face of our Heavenly Father, and who know exactly what his will is for us at all times, are present to change our sorrow to joy and our darkness to light.

What great joy it will be to meet the angels who have been closest to us throughout our earthly pilgrimage, and to converse with them concerning their part in helping us in our weaknesses, and in guiding us when the way was dark and lonely. There may be times when we wonder how circumstances could change so suddenly, or what it was that removed an obstacle that stood so threateningly in the way. Beyond the veil, we will have the joy of asking our guardian angel about the matter, and we will look back and praise the way our loving Heavenly Father, through the ministry of his guardian angels, led and helped us day by day. We look ahead to this great joy of meeting and being with this innumerable company of angels.

THE FIRSTBORN

By faith, we now see the “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” (Heb. 12:23) Paul is emphasizing that this is a large, comprehensive company. It is the entire spiritual class in the wonderful plan of God. The expression “firstborn” refers back to the time when God was dealing with the nation of Israel. The tribe of Levi was later substituted for the firstborn of the nation.

From the scriptural record, we read, "The LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names. And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel." (Num. 3:40,41) "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD."—vss. 44,45

The firstborn are those foreshadowed by the tribe of Levi. The whole tribe of Levi served the other tribes in matters pertaining to God and Israel's worship of God. When Canaan was divided among the other tribes, the tribe of Levi received no inheritance. The priests of Israel were of the tribe of Levi and were special servants in the Tabernacle and in the offering of sacrifices.

In the tribe of Levi, which took the place of Israel's firstborn, there is a general type of the two spiritual classes in the kingdom. There will be the antitypical priests who shall reign with Christ. "Thou didst make them to our God a Royalty and a Priesthood, and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:10, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) These are the overcoming class who will share with Jesus in his future kingdom. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21

There will also be a great multitude who will not be part of the faithful bride of Christ. “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:15-17) These will be servants in the kingdom. However, all are included in the “church of the firstborn” who gave up their inheritance in the land—their hope of restitution blessings here on earth.

If we continue to lay down our lives in sacrifice, and faithfully follow the Lamb, we can look forward to participating in that glorious general assembly beyond the veil. There we will meet all who have suffered and died for upholding the banner of Truth as witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God. What a joy it will be to participate in the congregation of the saints beyond the veil over which Jesus will preside. There are also many whom we have known personally in our own lifetime, during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, who may be part of that general assembly. Surely the anticipated joy of such a meeting should do much to help us endure the cross as we walk in newness of life.

JUST MEN MADE PERFECT

The Apostle Paul spoke of another class of devout men of God, and referred to them as, “the

spirits of just men made perfect.” (Heb. 12:23) This is a reference to the ancient prophets and those who, in ancient times, faithfully looked to God for guidance. As a reward for their faith, they will constitute the representatives of the earthly phase of the kingdom of Christ—the earthly Jerusalem.

Following the completion of the first resurrection and the meeting of the general assembly of the church of the firstborn, the Worthies of Old will be resurrected to human perfection on the earth. The Apostle Paul devoted the entire 11th chapter of his letter to the Hebrew brethren to that wonderful company of sacrificing servants of God.

The spirit of all these faithful servants was well illustrated by the three Hebrews who expressed their faith by telling King Nebuchadnezzar that their God, whom they served, was able to deliver them, but, even if he did not deliver them, they would still remain faithful to him. From the account, we read, “Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery

furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”—Dan. 3:14-18

Under the administration of Christ’s Millennial kingdom, all of these men of faith will be restored to life and will be the representatives upon the earth of “The Christ” in glory. In the spirit of their minds, they were always loyal to the Heavenly Father but, when they are made perfect, they will be able to render the kind of service they always longed to offer but were hindered by their imperfections.

INTERCESSION FOR US

We know that God is causing all things to work together for the benefit of our spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul explained, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”—Rom. 8:32-34

When we have completed our earthly pilgrimage, we will no longer need to have intercession made for us. Our loving Heavenly Father has cared for us throughout our consecrated walk in Christ Jesus, and by his power will ultimately exalt us to the very highest of all spiritual natures.

JESUS THE MEDIATOR

In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul encouraged them to greater faithfulness,

and explained the wonderful privileges awaiting them in Christ's future kingdom. He wrote, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [covenant]; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (II Cor. 3:6) The Prophet Isaiah had foretold God's purpose centuries before, when he said, "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages."—Isa. 49:8

We have the great joy of anticipation of the time when Christ's future kingdom will be established over the earth and "The Christ," as glorified ministers of a new and better covenant, will be privileged to share in the work of writing its laws in the hearts of all mankind. We may look forward to the superlative joy of being personally and intimately associated with Jesus as he mediates the New Covenant.

Jesus has been our Advocate, and in his name we have prayed to our Heavenly Father. He has been the Captain of our salvation, our Leader, and our Forerunner. Our Lord has been our Head, and his will has been our will. We have the unspeakable hope of seeing him face-to-face, and realize that soon we will be in the actual glorious presence of him who is so precious to us.

EXALTATION

Above and beyond all of the other joys that are set before us is the unsurpassed joy of meeting our loving Heavenly Father. "Who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of

the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.”—Ps. 89:6-9

The psalmist further wrote of our Heavenly Father, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.”—vss. 14-16

Our finite minds are incapable of grasping fully what it will mean to be ushered into the actual presence of God and to see him face-to-face. With untold ecstasy, we shall then behold him whose abundant love has lifted us out of the miry pit of sin and death. At that time, we will come to know him even as we have been known by him.

The psalmist has recorded the wonderful scene when the bride meets her Lord. “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace.”—Ps. 45:13-15

A NEW COVENANT

The sacrificial blood of Christ will be used symbolically to seal the New Covenant through which

the world of mankind will be blessed. Under the just terms of that covenant, the faithful members of the church will share with Jesus in the future work of blessing the whole world of mankind. This is one of the great joys to which we may look forward.

THE CURSE LIFTED

The blood of Christ will cry out to lift the condemnation which rests upon all mankind because of sin. The voice of Jesus' blood will make life available for all in their graves, and the curse of death which yet rests upon man and the earth will be lifted. What a blessing this will mean for the sin-cursed and dying human family!

Imperfect mankind will be restored to perfection. Those incarcerated in the great prisonhouse of death will be released. Health, joy, and life will spring forth everywhere because the "blood of sprinkling" will have spoken with a voice which will proclaim the glorious provisions of divine love for the dying race, and announce that the time has come for the fulfillment of God's promises to bless all the families of the earth. It is for this great blessing that our loving Heavenly Father has called us out of the world during this present Gospel Age to share with our dear Redeemer in this wonderful future work.

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