

The Grandest of All Gifts

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” II Corinthians 9:15 **THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS** that special time when the spirit of giving is more prevalent than at any other time of the year. Although we do not believe that our Lord Jesus was born on December 25th, but rather in October, we nevertheless take this opportunity to remember him, his earthly ministry and sacrificial death on behalf of the human family. He is the grandest of all gifts from our loving Heavenly Father—the gift of his only begotten Son and our dear Lord and Savior. As members of the fallen human family, this gift is so far beyond our ability to fully comprehend, that the Apostle Paul declares that it was ‘unspeakable.’

The Apostle Peter has used the same word ‘unspeakable’ in his first epistle, in connection with the promise of our sharing with Jesus in the glories of his coming kingdom. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing

of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—I Pet. 1:7,8

THE EARLY CHURCH

In the ninth chapter of II Corinthians, Paul has reminded the church at Corinth to be mindful of their brethren who may be in need of help, especially in the famine-stricken land of Judea. This is one of the few occasions in the history of the Early Church where the apostle, or others, have brought attention to the physical needs of some of their suffering brethren. After Pentecost, there was a time when the disciples decided to put all they had into a common treasury to be used as needed by the brethren or for the work, but this arrangement did not continue very long.

When famine conditions arose in Judea, Paul did not hesitate to seek funds necessary from brethren elsewhere to help supply some of the needs of the brethren in the stricken areas. He complimented the church at Corinth for their generosity. He wrote, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”—II Cor. 9:7,8

THE SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY

In the Early Church, the giving of gifts was a manifestation of the true spirit of Christ in the hearts of those who had consecrated themselves to follow in his footsteps. As the brethren understood

more fully this commitment, they realized that consecration to the Lord meant giving everything to him, even life itself. They knew also that the Lord had made them stewards of that which now belonged to him, including their time, strength, and all they had to be used in his service.

The importance of this characteristic of generosity is seen in the conversation Jesus had with the rich young ruler. From the scriptural account, we read, "A certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18) In Jesus' reply, he reminded the young man about the laws of righteousness. "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up."—vss. 20,21

However, "Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." (vs. 22) Jesus was speaking of the sacrificial life necessary to obtain an inheritance in Christ's spiritual kingdom. "When he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"—vss. 23,24

The true spirit of charity that may be demonstrated in our Christian lives will cause us to be unselfish and liberal in the use of whatever resources may come under our control as the Lord's stewards. In the act of giving, both the giver and the receiver are made glad as emphasized by the

Apostle Paul, who said, “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—Acts 20:35

ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

The joy to both the giver and the receiver is enhanced when the gift is examined and appreciated. Therefore, our joy may be increased by refreshing our memories concerning some of the wonderful characteristics of God’s ‘unspeakable gift’ to us. The Apostle John identifies Jesus in his prehuman existence as the ‘Word’ [*Logos*, Greek] of God. The literal translation states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with [the] God, and the Word was [a] God. The same was in the beginning with [the] God.” (John 1:1,2) The loving relationship between the Heavenly Father and his Son—the Word—is more fully appreciated when it is realized that the Son shared in the Father’s wonderful works of Creation. “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”—vss. 3-5

The Heavenly Father speaking to us through the psalmist concerning his Son declares, “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”—Ps. 89:27-29

A LOVING RELATIONSHIP

The one whom our Heavenly Father chose to be his unspeakable gift for the redemption of the world was the highest of all his creatures. He was the very beginning of his creation, and he was privileged to participate in all of the remaining creative works of the Father. The Son was constantly a delight to his Father, and in doing those things that were pleasing to him. What a blessing to have his Heavenly Father speak to him in such an intimate and loving manner. The loving relationship between the Father and the Son was deep beyond the ability of the human mind to grasp.

It was this beloved Son whom the Heavenly Father willingly gave for the salvation of the sin-cursed and dying human creation. When writing of this wonderful gift, John emphasized the extent to which it manifests God's great love for mankind. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."—John 3:16,17

There were perhaps some obedient ones among the hosts of heaven who would have desired to serve their Heavenly Father, but he chose to give the one who was the closest to him, and the one who was dearest to his own heart. A gift reveals the love of the giver, and what it may represent. By offering his only begotten Son to die as the world's Redeemer, he was giving the greatest treasure of his heart.

THE WIDOW'S MITE

The spirit of generosity was seen by Jesus when he witnessed a widow giving a very small gift to the Temple. He brought special attention to it as recorded by Mark, where we read, "Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."—Mark 12:41-44

To the wealthy, the mite had very little value, but because it was all that the widow had, her giving it to the Lord represented her deep spirit of loving devotion and self-sacrifice. In comparison, this was far beyond that which was given by those who out of their abundance were able to give larger sums.

There is nothing that we could give to make our Heavenly Father rich, and neither could we withhold anything to make him poor. The entire universe is his creation and is owned and controlled by him. The question may be asked, how could any gift that he could offer to the world be compared to the widow giving her mite?

As the mite represented all that the widow could give, in a far greater way did God give his beloved Son [Word, Greek *Logos*] to the world. He was the Father's first and only direct creation, and his willingness to give him to be the Savior of the world

meant the giving of the greatest treasure of his heart. While the *Logos* in his prehuman existence was not on the divine plane of life as was his Father, and could not share the same level of companionship, he was yet the highest of all others among the spirit creation. Thus to offer him as a Redeemer to die for mankind, meant the giving of that which cost him the very most, and, in this sense, all that he had.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

The Apostle John wrote, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) In reality, all life is a miracle and the most wonderful blessing from God, and we can little understand the manner in which the life of our Lord as the *Logos* was transferred to Mary and born as a babe in Bethlehem.

In his letter to the church at Philippi, the Apostle Paul speaks of this transfer of life and its purpose for man. In reference to Jesus, he wrote, "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."—Phil. 2:7,8

Having been made flesh was only the first step in the Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose concerning his beloved Son. Jesus, now made flesh, was yet to give his life as a perfect man in death for the life of the world. This reveals the great love that he had for his fallen and dying human creatures. Even as a child Jesus began to understand the reason

that he had been born into the world, and its ultimate purpose. This is indicated when he was in the Temple at the age of twelve. “He said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”—Luke 2:49

THE VOICE OF APPROVAL

At thirty years of age, Jesus presented himself to John at the River Jordan to be baptized. At that time, his Heavenly Father communicated directly with him, and he was assured of his true relationship with him. “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:16,17

There had always been sweet fellowship between the Father and Son, as we learn from the Master’s own words spoken at a later time. “I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.”—John 11:42

A MAN OF SORROWS

Centuries before Jesus’ miraculous birth as a perfect substitute for Adam, the Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning the rejection he would endure at the hands of sinful men. “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows,

and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”—Isa. 53:1-12

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Jesus was no longer living on a high plane of spirit life as the *Logos* who shared in the wonderful works of creation, and his ability to comprehend the Father's thoughts were then limited by his human mind. He was being offered in sacrifice, and the manner in which this must have affected the Heavenly Father is represented by the experience of Abraham when he was commanded to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice to God.

It was a three-days' journey for Abraham and Isaac as they travelled together to reach the land of Moriah where Isaac was to be offered in sacrifice. From the scriptural account, we read, "He [God] said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." (Gen. 22:2) Many centuries later the fulfillment of this antitypical scene was realized when the Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus travelled together toward Calvary's cross, and where Jesus willingly submitted himself as a sacrificial offering for the sins of the world.

Jesus no doubt had a general idea that he was to die, but he did not understand all the particulars that were involved until he reached Gethsemane. However, his Heavenly Father knew and in the unselfish giving of his unspeakable gift his loving heart must have been heavy as he witnessed the many hardships through which his Son was passing. The details reveal great suffering which he knew would increase even to the point when his beloved Son would cry out to him. The account

reads, “He went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”—Matt. 26:39

In the typical picture, Isaac displayed no opposition to his father, and was willing to be placed on the altar to be sacrificed, and so it was with Jesus when he was led to the cross to be crucified. As he walked together with his Heavenly Father during the three and one-half years of his earthly ministry, his chief concern was to be faithful in carrying out the will of his Father. He was conscious of the fact that the Father was always near to him. (John 11:42) This companionship of Father and Son was displayed throughout his time on earth.

God, however, understood fully the painful and ignominious end for Jesus to which his journey toward Calvary was leading. Only he knew that at the conclusion of his ministry his beloved Son would be tested to the utmost. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—Matt. 27:46

A WILLING SACRIFICE

In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul referred to a prophecy that spoke of Jesus and his readiness to do the Father’s will. “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) [Ps. 40:6-8] to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will,

O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.”—Heb. 10:7-9

Jesus always sought the Father’s will and humbly submitted himself to it as reflected in his own words. “He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” (John 8:29) However, obedience should merit reward and blessing, not ignominy and suffering. Even the Father had to endure, seeing his Son suffer so severely and knowing that on him would be laid the iniquity of the entire human family and removing from them the penalty of death to be manifest during his future kingdom.

During his forty days in the wilderness, our Lord no doubt learned that he was to die for the sins of the world. Later, he explained to his disciples that he knew that he would give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) Jesus’ understanding of the divine purpose and of his own part in that plan was progressive. He acknowledged to his disciples near the end of his earthly ministry that it was not yet time to understand the times and seasons of God’s plans. (Acts 1:7) He did not fully comprehend the extent to which he was to suffer in connection with his death until very near the end. Thus each experience that came to him served as a further test of his obedience to the divine will.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

Gethsemane was one of his most severe tests because he knew that he was about to die. He knew that this had been written of him in ‘the volume of the book,’ and that he, like Isaac, was to willingly place himself on the altar to be slain. However, he

had not foreseen that he was to be accused of blasphemy against God whom he loved dearly. He did not ask to be delivered from dying as man's Redeemer, but faithfully carried out every detail of his covenant of sacrifice. We do not know all of the details involved in his many tests during the last hours of his life, but he was subjected to ridicule and scoffing that further enhanced the true value of that unspeakable gift. From the scriptural record, we read, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."—Heb. 5:7,8

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Having endured the terrible suffering of being nailed to the cross, Jesus was then tormented by his onlookers. "The people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God." (Luke 23:35) Little did the people who were witnesses to this scene realize that by Jesus' refusal to save himself, he was in cooperation with his Heavenly Father to provide salvation for them and for all the families of the earth.

The Redeemer's last words were of complete confidence in the Father, and full surrender to his will. "Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last."—Luke 23:46,47, *New American Standard Bible*

LET US BE FAITHFUL

The principle of divine love represented by both the gift, and by the manner in which it was given, is held out in the Word of God as the only proper motivating power in our lives as we endeavor to be conformed to the pattern set before us, in both our loving Heavenly Father and the Son. Our appreciation of God's unspeakable Gift is thus greatly increased by the understanding that the atoning blood of our dear Lord and Savior has been made available for his faithful followers during this present Gospel Age, and for the whole world of mankind under the administration of Christ's future kingdom.

During this holiday season, may we reflect on our loving Heavenly Father's grandest gift to his human family, the gift of his dear Son. Let this enrich our hearts to a greater appreciation as we come to the end of another year, and look forward to his coming kingdom of blessing for all the families of the earth. ■