

A Meditation of Thanksgiving

***“It is a good thing
to give thanks unto
the LORD, and to
sing praises unto
thy name,
O most High.”***

—Psalm 92:1

IN THE OPENING WEEKS

of this New Year, it is quite appropriate that we seek to render our “thanks unto the LORD,” as our theme text declares. Another passage of Scripture we might consider as we begin our lesson declares these sentiments from the psalmist: “Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip. For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.”—Ps. 66:8-10, *New American Standard Bible*

“Thanks be to God that His grace has preserved us, ‘kept us from falling,’ through another year:—that so many of us are still of one heart and of one mind in respect to His Word and its service! When we remember that the Adversary is to be permitted to bring ‘strong delusions’ upon the Lord’s people for the very purpose of sifting out all not truly his (II Thess. 2:10-12), it should surely call forth our

thanks to God that the opening of another year finds us still standing fast,—appreciating the Truth, and in full accord with all the divine appointments by which He has kept us from falling.”—*Daily Heavenly Manna*, January 1

The foregoing words well express the sentiments which should be in the hearts of all the Lord’s consecrated people. As we review the year recently ended, and look forward to the days before us, most assuredly we can render our thanksgiving to God for the ways in which he has bountifully dealt with us. We know that God is continually providing all things needful for our growth and development in the narrow way. Thus, we realize that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”—James 1:17

GIVE THANKS EVERY DAY

Every day can be one of thanksgiving to us if we have the attitude, “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich.” (Prov. 10:22) Our thanks should appropriately include the good and needful things which we enjoy of a more material kind—food, clothing, shelter, family and friends. Indeed, many people in the world have a sense of thankfulness for their temporal blessings, and are able to enjoy, at least in some measure, the happiness afforded by these benefits.

A much deeper thanksgiving, however, is in our hearts if we have consecrated our lives in service to the Lord. Our gratitude to God causes us to say concerning our life, “As for me and my house, we

will serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:15) Recalling this lesson from Joshua, he entreated the people, who had slipped away from serving the true and living God and their covenant with him. Joshua laid before them a choice, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” We, who are now in covenant relationship with God, are likewise prone to slip due to our fallen flesh, and must daily make the same choice. We are exhorted in Psalm 2:11, “Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.” (NASB) Viewing our daily lives with such seriousness lends even greater importance to the words of Paul, “In every thing give thanks.”—I Thess. 5:18

In another place, Paul says, “Giving thanks always for all things.” (Eph. 5:20) Here again, the matter of thanksgiving goes far beyond the good things of this fleshly life. The “all things” for which we thank God include the privileges of spiritual enlightenment, and the providences of God in all our experiences. In addition, we are to be thankful for our trials as well as our blessings. Such an attitude of mind shows that we have committed our will to the doing of the Father’s will, and are thankful for the privilege of saying, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Our title suggests a connection between thanksgiving and meditation. The apostle states, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.” (I Tim. 4:15) The word “meditate” in this verse is defined by *Strong’s Concordance* as: to take care of; to revolve in the mind; to concern. The NASB translation says, “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them.” What

things are we to meditate on, take pains with, and be absorbed in? Our meditation should be centered on God—his wonderful plan, precious promises, and character attributes of wisdom, justice, love, and power. How our meditation on these things makes us thankful!

Our thanksgiving to God is also focused on the great gift of his only begotten Son, and for the promise of eternal life centered in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. We thank God, and love him, “because he first loved us.” He has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” All of this God has made possible, “For by grace ye are saved through faith; . . . it is the gift of God.” (I John 4:19; II Tim. 1:9; Eph. 2:8) God’s grace, or favor, assures us that he desires only those conditions in our life which will help our progress in the narrow way, and which will best assist us in making our calling and election sure. “No good thing will he withhold.”—Ps. 84:11

Concerning his life, Paul said, “I . . . esteem all things to be a loss, on account of the excellency of the knowledge of the anointed Jesus.” (Phil. 3:8, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) His reason is given in the last part of the verse, “that I may win Christ.” If we are like Paul, and “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling,” the things that we suffer now will not be “worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,” an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (Phil. 3:14; Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:17) Such words should strengthen us, as they did Paul, to continue in our Christian walk, even unto death.

OUR HEART'S EARNEST DESIRES

Our thanksgiving to God should instill in our heart certain desires related to the fulfillment of our consecration vows. We, who are walking in the narrow way, have been given much, and of us much is required. (Luke 12:48) One of our chief desires is to be strengthened spiritually by “the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” and to be built up in our “most holy faith.” (Jude 3,20) Closely related is the desire we should have to always dwell under the wings of our Heavenly Father. (Ps. 91:4) To be under his wings implies that our focus is heavenward—upward. This will greatly assist us in being built up in our “most holy faith,” and enable us to more fully “draw near” to God “with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”—Heb. 10:22

Another desire we are to have is zealotry to serve the Lord. As children of the Most High, we should be constantly watching for opportunities to serve him and his people, and do with our might what our hands find to do. (Eccles. 9:10) Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” to which Paul adds, “Seek those things which are above.” (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1) The word “seek” in these verses has the thought of “endeavor” and to “strive after,” showing the importance of work and service in our effort to attain the heavenly “kingdom of God.”

An important desire we should have is to look for the Lord’s providential overruling in our affairs. This means we must submit to his all-wise direction. To do so requires great care to ensure that our will is submissive to his, and, to the greatest extent possible, that our actions are similarly in harmony with those things he would have us do. In thanksgiving,

once again, we can realize the benefits of the covering robe of Christ's righteousness at those times when we fail. (Isa. 61:10) Yet, our heart's desire should always be to submit our entire being as "a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God," a "reasonable service."—Rom. 12:1

We recall the wonderful examples of those who demonstrated great faith in the Heavenly Father, in particular those Old Testament heroes of faith identified in Hebrews, chapter 11. Herein is another of our desires, that we strive for the same level of faith which they possessed, remembering that the things which took place in ages past "happened . . . for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition." (I Cor. 10:11) With the development of such faith should also come great humility, as we remember these faithful ones of the past, although "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."—Heb. 11:39,40

The longing desire of each consecrated heart is to see the Lord, "face to face." (I Cor. 13:12) Although this verse says we presently "see through a glass, darkly"—that is, obscurely or only in part—it is, nevertheless, critical that we "study to shew" ourselves "approved unto God." (II Tim. 2:15) We must study the doctrines of God's Word; study our course of conduct; study to keep the proper spirit of the Lord in our heart; study our vow of consecration and its requirements; study both our strengths and our weak points. Our desire to see the Lord face to face can only be realized if we first have the desire, and put forth the effort, to study these things,

as they pertain to our walk in the narrow way, and learn by them.

SING PRAISES

Our opening text says that it is a “good thing” to render thanks and sing praises to the Lord. It is good in the sense that it is appropriate, reasonable and logical. It is good because a failure to do so would indicate an utter lack of appreciation of God’s goodness. If we truly value what the Lord is doing for us on a daily basis, our thanksgiving will spontaneously go to him. We may even find ourselves prompted to sing aloud to our Heavenly Father in thanksgiving to him. Such is quite appropriate, as David writes, “Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.”—Ps. 100:2-4

In Psalm 92:2, the verse following our opening text, David speaks of showing forth God’s “loving-kindness in the morning” and his “faithfulness every night.” These words suggest a continual showing forth of praise to our Heavenly Father. It is not something which we do just occasionally, or only when things seem to be going well for us. If our heart has been touched by the loving-kindness of our God we will not be able to refrain from showing forth his praises at all times, and in all proper ways. In another psalm, David equates continual praise to life itself: “Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.”—Ps. 63:3,4, *NASB*

Another way to praise God is stated: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Col. 4:2) Note in this verse the connection between prayer and thanksgiving. Every victory of faith is an occasion for a prayer of thanksgiving. Every trial is an occasion for prayer for promised grace from our loving Heavenly Father. Our failures, especially, are occasions for prayers of forgiveness, as well as divine guidance. In all of these circumstances, Paul writes, "Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."—Heb. 4:16

Victories bring an especially needful season for prayer, that we do not become high-minded or puffed up. Rather, we should pray to remain humble and watchful for the next attack of the Adversary, which we know is sure to come. On the contrary, any seeming victory not followed by prayer, is not truly a victory, for it will leave a wide opening for Satan to soon attack again, the result of which is much less likely to be victory on our part.

Psalm 92:3 states that we show praise to God "upon an instrument of ten strings." It is believed that the ancient harp, such as was used by David, had ten strings, and we might properly think of it as representing the Truth, with its many harmonious "strings," as the principal medium by which we praise God. True appreciation of his wonderful plan should be a compelling motivation for our praise to him. As the Apostle Peter reminds us, "Ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

A SONG OF TRUTH

As Truth-enlightened people, we echo the words, “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” (Ps. 40:3) The truth of God’s plan is illustrated in various ways in the Bible. One of these is that of food, or meat. How thankful we are to be living at the time when we believe our Lord has come at his Second Advent, has girded himself, and served his household with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37,42) We have the privilege of taking this meat into our mouth, eating it, digesting it, which then produces a “new song” in our mouth of praise to God.

Thanksgiving for the truth of God’s Word is also afforded us by using it as the “armour of light.” (Rom. 13:12) This armor is the means by which we are protected against “the wiles of the devil,” and “all the fiery darts of the wicked.” How greatly we need this protection, especially now as we live in the foretold “evil day” during which Satan is making every effort possible to overthrow our faith and destroy us as New Creatures! —Eph. 6:10-18

Water is also used in the Bible to represent Truth. We are sanctified and cleansed, Paul says, with the “washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:26) Water is also a source of refreshment, and quenches the thirst. Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:14) Each of these illustrations helps us to comprehend more fully all that the “new song” of Truth means to us. It nourishes, strengthens, serves as a protecting armor, sanctifies, cleanses, refreshes, and fully quenches our thirst.

HARMONY OF GOD'S PLAN

A song suggests harmony, and by this illustration we are reminded of the wonderful harmony of God's plan. "We have not followed," Peter says, the discordant sounds of "cunningly devised fables," but rather the harmonious "sure word of prophecy, . . . a light that shineth in a dark place." (II Pet. 1:16,19) The harmonious song of Truth fills our hearts with thanksgiving to God for his loving-kindness. Hence, in return, we also sing forth in similar harmony to others—our brethren, and even the world. What a privilege will be ours, if faithful, to sing that "new song before the throne" of our Heavenly Father and his glorified Son.—Rev. 14:3

As we sing forth the harmonious proclamation of Truth to others, we should not be disappointed or surprised that most will not be able to learn it themselves. Only a "little flock" can do this at the present time. (Luke 12:32) Others, however, may be impressed by what they hear, and see something of its beauty and harmony. Yet, they are unable to sing it themselves. By way of example, very few who listen with appreciation to a trained chorus of singers presenting *The Messiah* could sing this anthem of praise as it should be rendered. Nevertheless, they appreciate hearing others sing it, and are fascinated by, and take pleasure in, its melody and harmony.

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." (II Tim. 4:2, *NASB*) With these words, Paul reminds us that our spiritual voices should always be ready, even at times when it may not be personally convenient for us, to give voice to the song of Truth. Surely, as he says in another place, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"—I Cor. 9:16

BLESSINGS TO THE PEOPLE

During the present Gospel Age, only a relative few have been drawn and called of God to consecration and to a covenant by sacrifice. God, however, loves the entire world, and gave his Son a “ransom for all,” not merely for some. (John 3:16; I Tim. 2:5,6) When the work of the present age is complete, the Heavenly Father, through his glorified Son Christ Jesus and his bride, will pour out rich blessings to the rest of mankind. Peter speaks of this time as their “day of visitation,” which will bring a “restitution of all things” back to the perfect conditions enjoyed by our first parents before they sinned. (I Pet. 2:12; Acts 3:20,21) Our privilege now of knowing these future purposes of God toward his human creation should be one of our great sources of thanksgiving.

People are rapidly losing their confidence in man's ability to solve the worldwide problems in the Earth today. The foretold “distress of nations, with perplexity,” is increasing, despite human efforts to establish peace and security. (Luke 21:25) Fears of many kinds grip mankind in nearly every corner of the world, while at the same time nations and governments continue to grow their armies and armaments. Thankfully, this too will soon come to an end. God's righteous kingdom will be set up “in the top of the mountains, . . . and all nations shall flow unto it.” In that kingdom, “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”—Isa. 2:2-4

The Prophet Isaiah, foretelling present conditions, said, “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) Nevertheless, the time is near when the “Sun of righteousness” will

rise “with healing in his wings,” and the earth “shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Mal. 4:2; Hab. 2:14) Then will be fulfilled the promise given so long ago to the ancient patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that through a promised seed—Christ and his church—“all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”—Gen. 28:14

How appropriate that our witness of these truths should be as a song of praise! It is not something which we engage in because we feel it is merely our duty to do so. Rather, it should come as a spontaneous expression of our love for the Heavenly Father and his plan. “How beautiful,” Paul says, it is to speak “the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15) Let us remember also that our witness of these things is not just to be at the beginning of a new year, or at other specially designated times of thanksgiving or celebration. We are to daily “sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth.”—Isa. 42:10

THE TIME IS SHORT

We do not know how much longer we will have the privilege of publicly singing the new song of the Truth. Therefore, it is of great importance that, while the Lord permits, we continue to bear witness concerning God’s wonderful kingdom by every means available—personal witnessing, the printed page, radio, television, the Internet, and the many other forms of electronic media and communication available today. Paul said, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, . . . and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a

price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (I Cor. 6:19,20) Because we do not know what tomorrow may hold for us, let us continually seek to glorify God by telling forth the beautiful message of the kingdom.

In his closing words to Timothy, Paul exhorted him, saying, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; . . . And they shall turn away their ears from the truth. . . . But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” (II Tim. 4:3-5) Although these words had meaning in Paul’s day and throughout the age, they have special significance now, as we draw nearer to the close of the Gospel Age, and the troubles of this present world grow ever deeper. We, like Timothy, are admonished to continue to watch in all things, endure afflictions which may come to us, and make full proof of our ministry. “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,” Peter says, “and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and reverence.”—I Pet. 3:15

The dark night of the world’s distress is settling more and more deeply over the earth. Hence, we should not be surprised if our liberty to publicly proclaim the new song is restricted in the future. It is appropriate, then, that we copy the example of Jesus, who said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:4,5) The Master commissioned us also, as lights, saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.”—Matt. 5:16

If we are faithful to our vow of consecration, we will have the privilege of being associated with our head, Christ Jesus, in the glorious work of enlightening and blessing the whole world of mankind. Let our meditations of thanksgiving find a firm foundation in the harmonious song of God's Word. "Trust in the LORD, and do good; . . . follow after faithfulness. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."—Ps. 37:3-5, *Revised Version* ■