

“Ready to Be Offered”

“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

—II Timothy 4:6,7

[PREFACE: In last month's issue of The Dawn, an article appeared entitled “A Faithful Saying.” It included a consideration of some of the experiences of Apostle Paul near the close of his life, and the privileges of the Lord's consecrated people of the Gospel Age to likewise sacrifice as part of the antitypical atonement-day sin offering. The article appearing on the following pages of The Dawn also delineates many important lessons concerning these subjects. Although the reader will find some overlap in the two articles, it is our belief that the child of God is helped by having reinforced in his mind these important truths. We, as Paul, have been given a great opportunity to share in the sacrificial work of Christ, the purpose of which is to develop us to be part of the sympathetic High Priest class in his kingdom. It is with a sincere desire that we each renew our efforts to be faithful, as Paul was,

to our vows of sacrifice, that we present this further consideration of these matters to our readers.]

WHEN SAUL OF TARSUS, who had been blinded by the brilliancy of divine glory as he traveled along the Damascus road on an errand of persecution, later lay prostrate and praying in the home of Judas on a street called Straight, in Damascus, the Lord instructed Ananias to visit him, saying, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—Acts 9:16

Through many years of untiring devotion to the Lord, Paul learned the meaning of these words, for he had been a faithful follower of the Master and a joyful partner in his suffering. Now he had reached the end of that way of suffering—a way which had led to prisons, stripes, stonings, perils of the sea and perils of the land, and trials among false brethren. Lastly, it had led him to now patiently wait for the consummation of his sacrifice—he was “ready to be offered.” Paul had no desire to turn back, no regrets for what he had endured. From the human standpoint his life had been a failure, but his was not the human viewpoint. To him his life of toil and suffering was the path to glory. He knew that those who suffer with Christ will reign with him in his kingdom.

In his farewell letter to Timothy, Paul had urged him to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” and to commit the truth which he had learned to “faithful men,” who in turn would commit it to others. (II Tim. 2:2,3) This is a possible reference to the ancient relay races in which the contestants carried torches and passed them from

one to the other. No hope was held out to Timothy that living the Christian life faithfully would result in ease, or that he should expect a carefree and happy existence according to the flesh. However, Paul also reminded Timothy of the verity of God's promises which give assurance that those who suffer with Christ will reign with him.—II Tim. 2:10-13

Paul knew much of the inward, spiritual joys of being a Christian, for by faith he had been blessed by the peace and joy of Christ. He who wrote to the Philippians admonishing them to "rejoice in the Lord alway" did so from the depth of his own "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 4:4; Rom. 5:11) He knew also that the Christian's present joys of faith are the fruitage of one's confidence in the unseen things of promise. Of Christ, Paul wrote that "for the joy that was set before him" he "endured the cross, despising the shame."—Heb. 12:2

Paul was blessed with this same kind of joy—a joy that was set before him by the promises of God. These promises assured him that after the fighting there would come peace, after the suffering a crown of righteousness, and after death a glorious divine life. He explained that without this hope of a resurrection we would be "of all men most miserable," that our standing "in jeopardy every hour" would be folly, and that being baptized in death for the future benefit of the dead world would be in vain.—I Cor. 15:19,29,30

Indeed, Paul knew of the joys of faith, but he understood that those joys depended upon a firm conviction, a "witness of the Spirit," that present faithfulness will merit the Lord's "well done."

Therefore, he admonished Timothy to “be strong,” to “strive,” to “endure hardness.” (II Tim. 2:1-5) He reminded him that those who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse,” Paul warned, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.”—II Tim. 3:12-14

Paul’s farewell letter to Timothy is a masterpiece of admonition, encouragement, advice, and warning. More powerful than the words themselves is the apostle’s own example of how he had put them into practice. We could perhaps paraphrase many of Paul’s final instructions with these words:

“Endure hard trials, Timothy, and be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ, even as I have strived to be. Timothy, I have given you the torch of truth, just as they do on a racecourse, so that you, too, can pass it on to others. You are running in the great racecourse of the Gospel Age. I have nearly finished my course, Timothy. I am just about at the end of the way, but you carry on. Hold fast to the truth. You will have to contend with evil men and seducers. In fact, they will grow worse and worse, but stand your ground, Timothy. Continue in the things which you have learned. You can do it, for the Lord will help you. He has made every provision for you in his Word and by his promises. They are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Study these, as well as your own character, in order that you may be able to be approved by God, and rightly divide his Word of truth. Timothy, I have kept the faith to the

best of my ability, and I know that you can do this also. It is a sacred trust—treasure it and defend it, whatever the cost may be.”

“READY TO BE OFFERED”

From the time of his conversion on the Damascus road, Paul had been “ready to be offered.” The proof of this is in the fact that his whole life from that time onward had been made an offering. Nothing had been held back. When he wrote to the brethren in Rome, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice,” he was merely expressing to them what he himself had done and was continuing to do.

In his previous imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote the Philippians a farewell letter in which he also expressed his readiness to be offered. “For me to live is Christ,” he wrote—meaning that he was willing to continue living unto and serving Christ—but “to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21) He was ready to be offered in whatever way his Lord wanted him to be. He would be glad to continue offering his body a living sacrifice; or, he was ready to be offered in actual death.

When writing to the Philippians, Paul was not willing to speak with boldness concerning his own attainments and standing before the Lord. “I count not myself to have apprehended,” he wrote. He was pressing hard toward the mark, however, and determined that he would know Christ and have the “fellowship of his sufferings” and be “made conformable unto his death.”—Phil. 3:10-14

There was no question about Paul’s determination at this time, but there was one factor of which

he was not sure. He did not know for a certainty that he had reached the end of the way. Thus, he realized that as long as the element of time entered into the matter, there was always the possibility of failure. Paul did not believe the false, human philosophy of “once in grace, always in grace.” If his trial period was to continue, he must keep on pressing toward the mark.

When writing to Timothy the second and last time, however, Paul evidently knew with certainty that he was about to be executed. Throughout all the hard years of the past, he had endured. He had learned how to be abased and how to abound. (Phil. 4:12) None of the difficulties, trials, and persecutions he endured had beaten his courage down. (II Cor. 11:23-28) “This one thing I do” had been his motto, and that “one thing” was to “know Christ,” through a fellowship in his sufferings and by being made conformable unto his death.

Now Paul faced perhaps his final test. We can imagine a Roman guard approaching the chained apostle, announcing the fateful news that he was to be executed. When he wrote to the Philippians that it would be “gain” for him to die, it was theological. Indeed, it was based upon unbounded faith and a resolute determination that actual death in the Lord’s cause would be welcome. However, the fateful word had not yet been spoken—the supreme test had not been applied.

There was now no question about it. He had heard that word. He was to die. Yet, in his heart welled up an ecstasy of joy which assured the beloved apostle that God was standing by to help him in this supreme moment. He found himself

ready and glad, and could say, “I am now ready to be offered”—finally, completely, in sacrificial death. It might be easy to say that we are ready to die for Christ when there is little prospect that such a privilege will come our way very soon. This privilege had now come to Paul, and he was ready.

There is nothing surprising about this, for he had proven his readiness at each step of the way. He had embraced every opportunity he could find to lay down his life for his Lord, for the Truth, for the brethren, and for the world. His readiness when the final opportunity came was but the result of his faithfulness in meeting every other test to which he had been subjected. It is to be so with us. Faithfulness in the small things leads to faithfulness in the large. A lifetime of faithfulness in sacrifice prepares for the supreme sacrifice at the end of the way. Thus Paul could write, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.”—II Tim. 4:8

DEAD WITH CHRIST

Paul based his confidence on the promises of God, and we can do the same. “It is a faithful saying,” he wrote, that “if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” (II Tim. 2:11,12) This should be the basis of our confidence, as it was Paul’s. It is “a faithful saying,” inspired by the Heavenly Father himself.

Throughout all the years of Paul’s faithful ministry he had been suffering and dying with Christ. Never during all that time had he denied his

Master, whether it was before Roman governors, hypocritical Pharisees, Caesar, chained to a prison guard, or locked in stocks. He had always rejoiced to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. 1:24) The Lord had shown him the prospect of suffering, as explained to Ananias, and Paul had accepted these terms of his apostleship. Now, facing certain death, he could have denied Christ and walked out of the Roman prison a free man. He did not, and had no desire to do so. He was, instead, ready to be offered, glad to be offered, anxious to be offered.

Paul knew well the import of “if we be dead” and “if we suffer.” He had surmounted the “if” conditions of faithfulness to God by his daily life of sacrifice and service, never questioning God’s direction. There had been no question in his mind when he faced the angry Jews in Damascus, soon after his conversion. There was no question when he was locked in the dungeon of the prison in Philippi. There was no question when he preached all night in Troas and walked twenty-five miles the next day to join his ship. Finally, there was no question now, when he was to die because he taught that the crucified Jesus was raised from the dead and will return in due time to establish a kingdom. For this, Paul was glad to die. If we have similarly been faithful during the course of our Christian life, we too can have quiet confidence that we have kept the “if” conditions of our walk.

DEVOTED TO SACRIFICE

When Paul wrote to Timothy saying that he was ready to be “offered,” he used the Greek word *spendo*,

which means to devote one's life, or blood, in sacrifice. Up to this point, the apostle had offered his time, strength, talents, reputation—all that he had, except life itself. Now he was ready to fully offer that—symbolically speaking, to shed his blood.

In Paul's letter to the Hebrews, in which he encouraged them to faithfulness in sacrifice, he wrote, "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." (Heb. 12:3,4) To resist "unto blood" means to complete the sacrifice of one's life, even as Jesus did. Paul had followed in the footsteps of Jesus, rejoicing in the privilege of suffering with him, but he had not yet resisted unto "blood"—his life had not been fully and actually given in sacrifice. However, he was willing and ready for this final experience of the narrow way—ready to be "offered."

The language used by the apostle reminds us of the typical sacrifices offered in connection with the Tabernacle services. In those offerings the blood, or life, of the animals was shed in sacrifice in order to make illustrations of the "better sacrifices" of this Gospel Age. On the typical Day of Atonement—the tenth day of the seventh month—a bullock and a goat were offered, the bullock foreshadowing Jesus, and the goat, the members of his body.

The lesson of Hebrews 13:10-15 is evidently based upon this typical atonement-day service. In that service, three parts of the one offering were progressing simultaneously. The bullock was slain and its fat was burned on the brazen altar in the

court. Its body, or carcass, together with its hide, was burned “without the camp.” At the same time, two hands full of incense were offered on the golden altar in The Holy of the Tabernacle.

The sacrifice of the Lord’s goat was carried out in a similar manner, and Paul’s reference to the service shows clearly that the goat represents the consecrated footstep followers of Christ. The three parts, or phases, of the sacrifice appropriately picture three viewpoints of the offerings made by Jesus and his body members—the viewpoint of the world, the viewpoint of those justified in God’s sight, and the viewpoint of God. The world’s viewpoint is pictured by the burning of the carcass outside the camp. This viewpoint is not favorable. In the type, this burning undoubtedly created a stench in the nostrils of the Israelites, and so does the sacrificial life of the consecrated child of God appear to the world.

At the same time, however, within the court, the fat of the animals was burned. The burning of the fat pictures the consuming zeal of the truly faithful, and this is looked upon favorably by those dwelling in this antitypical justified condition. The sacrifices of the Lord’s people should be, and are, appreciated by one another, and we should ever be on the alert for opportunities to zealously “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” of sacrifice.—Heb. 10:24

Incense was burned upon the golden altar in The Holy of the Tabernacle on the typical Day of Atonement. The coals of fire for this offering were carried by the priest from the brazen altar in the court as the fat of the bullock was burning. This

indicates that it was by Jesus' faithfulness in sacrifice that the way into The holy, and even the Most Holy, was to be also opened to his footstep followers. (Heb. 10:19,20) It was the sweet perfume from the incense burning on the golden altar that penetrated into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, showing God's acceptance of Jesus' offering. Thus, by means of his accepted offering for "his household," we are privileged, as the Lord's goat, to similarly lay down our lives in sacrifice, and offer the incense of our faithfulness, through Christ, as a sweet savor to God.

How we rejoice that those things which are a stench in the nostrils of the world are a sweet odor to God. What encouragement this must have been to Paul. As he went from place to place in God's service, laying down his life in sacrifice, the world despised him, but he had the blessed assurance that God was well pleased. Many times Paul was encouraged by the brethren, although some of these turned against him when the final test came. Yet God was with him to supply all his needs to the very end of his course—until his offering was fully consumed.

OUR ALTAR

"We have an altar," Paul says, "whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." (Heb. 13:10) Here, and in the verses following, Paul hearkens back to the offerings of the typical Day of Atonement, in which the blood of the bullock and the goat was taken into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle and sprinkled upon the mercy seat as an atonement for sin each year. It is evident that

Paul, in this context, is identifying the sacrifices of the followers of Christ as part of those of the antitypical Day of Atonement. “We have an altar,” he says—that is, we are invited to present our bodies a living sacrifice. The offering of sacrifice calls for an altar, and the altar we have is the one typified by that on which the sin-offering animals of the Day of Atonement were sacrificed.

In the case of those typical sacrifices, the priests were not allowed to eat the meat of the animals. What was not burned on the brazen altar in the court had to be taken “without the camp” and burned. Paul applies the lesson of this, saying, “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” (vss. 12,13) There is no mistaking the meaning of this. Paul is telling us that such an altar in the type foreshadows our share in the sacrificial “sin offering” work of Christ. We, like Jesus, are to go outside the camp, bearing his reproach, as represented by the burning of the sin-offering animals “without the camp.”

In drawing this beautiful lesson from the typical atonement-day sacrifices, the apostle also alludes to the burning of the incense on the golden altar within The Holy. He says, “By him therefore [that is, by the faithfulness of Jesus’ offering as the anti-typical bullock] let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” (vss. 15,16) “Such sacrifices” are our daily offerings of incense to God.

Let us note once again the importance of Paul's words concerning our share in the antitypical atonement-day sacrifices:

(1) "We have an altar" whereof those who served the Tabernacle were not permitted to eat—typified by the brazen altar in the court as used on the Day of Atonement.

(2) "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach"—typified by the burning of the carcasses of the slain animals outside of the Tabernacle, "without the camp."

(3) "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name"—typified by the offering of incense upon the golden altar in The Holy of the Tabernacle.

These three aspects of Christian sacrifice are in reality all parts of one offering. The chief concern to us as Christians should be God's viewpoint of our sacrifice. Is he well pleased? Is our course in life like an odor of sweet incense to him? Are we offering the sacrifice of praise to him continually? Paul speaks of this as the "fruit of our lips." It is an offering we make in order to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

To praise God as we should in this world of sin and darkness does result in sacrifice. It means making known his glorious virtues as reflected in his great plan of the ages—in other words, bearing witness to the Truth. In the case of Paul, his time, strength, and talents were used faithfully to praise God by making known the unsearchable riches of his grace as exemplified through Christ Jesus. To

the world this was a stench, so much so that finally the apostle was arrested and sentenced to die. To God, however, it was a sweet odor, an evidence of Paul's faithfulness.

Those who are truly the Lord's will appreciate the sweet odor of sacrifice of their fellow brethren. They will encourage one another to faithfulness in sacrifice. They will seek to provoke one another to love and good works. Paul never hesitated to exhort the brethren to faithfulness in sacrificing, and he appreciated those who reciprocated by encouraging him. At times we may be disappointed in the brethren. Paul, in his farewell letter to Timothy, wrote from prison, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me." (II Tim. 1:15) These had put themselves out in the "camp," as it were, where they viewed Paul's sacrifice even as did the unbelieving world. They did not appreciate his zeal and loving devotion, nor did they endeavor to encourage him to faithfulness or seek to be faithful themselves.

The Truth is no more popular today than it was in Paul's time. The laws of the land may be such as to prevent the imprisonment of those who publish the message, yet the worldly-minded still look with disdain upon the sacrifices of the saints. The zeal and self-sacrificing devotion of the Lord's people is still a stench in the nostrils of those who walk in darkness. Are we taking our place with those who are thus laying down their lives? What a glorious privilege we all have to stand by one another.

Not many of us will likely finish our earthly course in a prison, as Paul did, yet the way is still open for sacrifice. There is still opportunity for

offering up the sacrifice of praise to God, even the fruit of our lips, by making known the beauties of his plan of salvation. We know the world will not appreciate this, but the true brethren of Christ will—and, most importantly, God will be pleased.

God watched over Paul, as a loving Heavenly Father, during the final days and hours of his earthly experience. The sweet perfume of the burning incense of his sacrifice had penetrated into the antitypical Most Holy, even to heaven itself. Through the promises, Paul could hear the reassuring words, “Well done!” The faithful saying, that those who suffer and die with Jesus shall live and reign with him, was now a rock of strength to the apostle, for he was confident that, with the Lord’s help, he had passed the tests.

Years before, Paul wrote to the church at Rome, saying, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” (Rom. 8:35,36) When Paul wrote these words to the brethren at Rome, he was persuaded that none of the things mentioned could turn him aside from the course of sacrifice.—vss. 37-39

Now he was in Rome—not visiting the ecclesia, but in prison. Distress, tribulation, persecution, and certain death were all heaped upon him. He had been selected for “slaughter” and was glad. Rejoicing in spirit, he wrote, “I am now ready to be offered”—ready to pour out my life to complete the sacrifice which was started on the Damascus road.

The same promises of God which sustained Paul in the hour of his great need also apply to us. If, like him, we are faithful in the doing of God's will, joyfully laying down our lives in giving praise to God, we too can say—and say it with confident assurance in the promises of God—that a crown of righteousness is laid up for us, and for all those who “love his appearing.” ■