

“I Have Set the LORD Always before Me”

***“I have set the
LORD always before
me: because he is at
my right hand, I
shall not be
moved.”***

—Psalm 16:8

Preface: The following article is taken from a discourse given by Brother Edward Fay at the 1976 Bible Students General Convention. We gladly republish it here, with the hope that it will be a blessing to all of our readers, as it was to the brethren who attended the General Convention and heard these words some forty years ago.

THIS PROPHETIC PSALM concerns Jesus, and describes his heart attitude while he walked as a man upon the earth, as expressed centuries before by the Psalmist David: “Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.” (Ps. 16:1) Our Lord, throughout his First Advent, knew well that without God’s care, guidance, and protection, he would be unable to resist the snares of the Adversary or to attain his longed-for hope, which was to be part of

God's family on the highest plane of existence. The *Revised Standard Version* states it this way: "I say to the LORD, thou art my Lord; I have no good apart from thee. As for the saints in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight."—vss. 2,3

We know this beautiful psalm is prophetic because the Apostle Peter quoted from it in the second chapter of Acts, verses 25 through 28, and Paul referred to it in one of his sermons. (Acts 13:32-37) In each instance, they showed that David was not speaking of himself, but spoke of the resurrection of Christ Jesus. (Acts 2:29-31) Thus we have the proper and inspired authority to attribute these words to Jesus, and to know that they expressed his hopes and heartfelt feelings.

In our theme text, the word "moved" is translated from the Hebrew word *mot*. This word means to waver, slip, or fall. What it is saying prophetically of Jesus is, paraphrasing, "Because I put God always before me, and because he is at my right hand, I shall not waver, or slip, or fall." This is a very important statement, because it contains information concerning one of the "mysteries"—or sacred secrets—of God's plan. Only the true disciples of Christ, those begotten by God's Holy Spirit, know these mysteries. The sacred secret in our text is that our Lord could have wavered, slipped, or fallen. It was possible that he could have failed his mission. We know that Jesus had to perform perfectly, fulfilling the will of his Heavenly Father completely in every detail, in order, at the end of his course, to receive a resurrection from the dead.

Our theme text explains how our Lord Jesus was able to accomplish his goal during his earthly walk.

It was because he “set” God before him. Jesus was keenly aware of his Father’s plans and purposes as they concerned himself. This awareness came about through his intense study and meditation upon the Holy Scriptures from childhood to manhood, and later, after his baptism, the further illumination provided by the Holy Spirit. To have God at his “right hand” was to have the power of the Almighty immediately accessible for aid, counsel, encouragement, and enlightenment. Jesus had a complete understanding of God’s plan and his relationship to the Father in that plan, and he depended fully upon the Father’s instructions and power to perform his will.

REVELAMENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Scriptures indicate that our Lord Jesus did not know the details of God’s plan for himself until the time of his consecration to God, and acceptance by him, through the administration of the Holy Spirit, at the age of thirty. He was born into the world as a babe and received his first knowledge of God through his natural senses, as we all do. No doubt he was instructed in God’s Word by his mother, Mary, and by his step-father, Joseph, who were faithful and devout Israelites. At the age of twelve, Jesus sat in the Temple at Jerusalem with the Jewish religious leaders, “both hearing them, and asking them questions.” (Luke 2:41-52) Because of his brilliant, perfect mind, he amassed information much more quickly than the average child. However, it was not until after his begettal by the Holy Spirit that he understood the particulars concerning how his Father wished him to carry out his mission to a successful conclusion.

Many Scriptures were prophetic of our Lord and his earthly ministry. In another Psalm, we read, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required." (Ps. 40:6) To paraphrase these prophetic words, Jesus was saying, "I realize that you, dear Father, were not satisfied with the blood of bulls and goats. They were merely pictures indicating the fact that my perfect life must be poured out and presented to you as a corresponding price in place of Adam, in order that men might gain life."—Lev. 16; Heb. 10:1-12; Rom. 5:18,19

Evidently it was at this time, also, that Jesus learned about his pre-human existence. (Prov. 8:22-31) He became aware from the Scriptures that he, God's only begotten Son, had been transferred from the courts of heaven to the womb of Mary for the very purpose of laying down his life in sacrifice. (Luke 1:35; 2:25-35) Not until this point in his earthly existence did Jesus fully realize his relationship to God's plan, and the fact that he would die as a corresponding "ransom" price for Adam.—Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:5,6

With majestic delight, Jesus, as he rose up out of the water after his baptism by John, heard his Father's voice speaking to him from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16,17) This wonderful assurance of God's favor and love was perhaps the first audible manifestation he had ever had. What a soul-satisfying and reassuring experience this must have been for Jesus, as he took the first step of his journey in ministering for three and one-half years.

REWARD PROMISED

At the same time, another amazing fact became clear to him. He learned not only that he had to die in Adam's place, but for the first time he realized that, if faithful, he would have a heavenly resurrection as a divine being—raised to the spirit realm on his Heavenly Father's own plane of existence. One Scripture that certainly would have come to Jesus' mind in this regard, which spoke prophetically of both his death and resurrection, were these words of God: "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 bare the sin of many."—Isa. 53:12

Another new thought was introduced to Jesus in these words. It concerned the fact that he was to have "brethren" associated with him in the carrying out of God's plan. (Heb. 2:9-13) They would be "the strong" spoken of in Isaiah's prophecy, with whom he would divide "the spoil." These are figurative expressions which indicate that there would be great rewards attached not only to Jesus' own faithfulness, but to the faithfulness of his consecrated followers, then and throughout the present Gospel Age.

At the point in time when the Lord understood that he must die as the ransom price, he also learned that there were conditions attached to his being resurrected to the divine nature. He must be faithful even until his death upon the cross. Only then would his earthly mission be "finished." (John 19:30) This requirement of complete faithfulness is brought out in a particularly meaningful way by a typical feature of the Mosaic Law, described with these words: "He [Aaron, Israel's high priest] shall put the incense

upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not.”—Lev. 16:13

INCENSE—SYMBOL OF AN ACCEPTABLE OFFERING

This feature of Israel’s typical Day of Atonement points forward to the necessity for Jesus to obey God faithfully in order to receive the promise of divine life. When the high priest went into The Holy of the Tabernacle with “his hands full of sweet incense beaten small,” and sprinkled it over the fire on the golden altar, it represented our Lord’s perfect sacrifice. (vs. 12) Two handfuls of incense was all the priest could hold, and represented Jesus’ offering of his entire being. When the high priest poured it over the coals of fire it caused a cloud of incense to fill the room—a sweet smell or savor—which filtered into the Most Holy in such a way as to cover the mercy seat. Only then could the high priest enter into the Most Holy. If the cloud of incense, indicating God’s acceptance of the Atonement Day offerings, did not precede him, the high priest would die as he tried to enter the Most Holy.

Jesus knew at the time of his enlightenment, through his understanding of God’s plan, that the Father would select all of his experiences, and that he had to meet each one perfectly. If he succeeded in this difficult walk, he would be resurrected not only as a spirit being, but on God’s own divine plane of existence. We can better appreciate how the incense illustrates this point from the words of the Apostle Paul, who must have been thinking of this picture, when he said, “Be ye therefore followers

of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”—Eph. 5:1,2

We, who have knowledge of the mysteries of God, must realize that we understand them for only one reason—that we are part of the body of Christ. As such we must lay down our lives in sacrifice as Jesus did. We have been called for this purpose, and our minds have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was on trial, and had to walk perfectly to receive a resurrection and exaltation to the divine nature. We understand the same conditions also apply to us, the only exception being that actual perfection is not required in our case, as it was with Jesus. In all other ways, however, the lessons which Jesus learned and which were necessary for his development, are applicable and necessary also to his consecrated body members. He learned the will of God for himself, and how to perform it, and so must we.

EXPERIENCES WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

As he did with Jesus, God also selects our experiences. Each one, if met properly, will develop us further to be an acceptable part of the body of Christ, and to receive a spiritual awakening on the divine plane. Paul stated, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”—Rom. 8:28,29

The awareness of God’s overruling of each and every situation in our lives, both temporal and

spiritual, should give us an attitude of mind in which we do not fret or worry about our experiences which are unpleasant, trying, or difficult. We should learn to accept them as did our Lord Jesus. He knew he had to suffer and die. Nevertheless, he was ready to yield himself to God's will in every matter in the way which he had been instructed through the Old Testament prophecies and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH

Following Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan, and after the forty days of temptation in the wilderness had successfully been endured, he "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." (Luke 4:14,15) We read next that he "came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read."—vs. 16

The Scripture reading which Jesus chose to use that day is of particular interest to us, because it contains an implication of another sacred secret of God. As Jesus stood in the center of the synagogue, "There was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the

acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book.”—Luke 4:17-20; Isa. 61:1,2

The phrase, “To preach the acceptable year of the Lord,” indicates to us that Jesus knew the Messiah was not himself alone. There would be no reason for him to preach such a message if only he comprised the Messiah. Jesus knew, however, that he and his faithful body members would share that distinction and honor, and that it was “the acceptable year of the Lord” to offer this wonderful and noble invitation to those with hearing ears and seeing eyes. (Matt. 13:16) He knew, too, that the anointing he had from God would be passed on to them, as we read in I John 2:27, “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you.”

When Jesus “closed the book,” in essence he was saying, “I stopped reading at this point in Isaiah’s prophecy because the utterance which follows is to be fulfilled at a later time during the Gospel Age.” The remaining words of the prophecy which Jesus omitted, were, “To proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”—Isa. 61:2,3

By the exclusion of these portions of the prophecy in his statement to the people of Nazareth, Jesus implied that later on, the rest of the prophecy would be fulfilled. Because we are living at the end of the age, when the time has come to proclaim the remainder of the message, we have revealed another

precious truth that is meaningful to us. We are among the anointed whom God has chosen to proclaim a message for our time—during the harvest of the Gospel Age. Let us faithfully perform our mission, as Jesus fulfilled his.

WORKS OF THE MESSIAH

As Jesus continued his ministry, he performed many miracles to attract the attention of those who were to become his disciples, making them realize that the Messiah was in their midst. Following his first recorded miracle, we find these words: “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” (John 2:11) Jesus, through the various miracles he performed, such as healing the sick and infirmed, casting out devils, and even raising the dead, gave samples of the much more magnificent and all-comprehensive work which will be exhibited by the Messiah when complete, and established in office upon the earth. He did these things to show that he was indeed the Messiah. However, these miracles were merely examples of the greater work of the Messiah, in its entirety, when the church is complete and the Messianic reign begins. This larger work will affect each and every human being on earth, the raising of the dead, and the opportunity to be given every person of restoration to full health, happiness, righteousness, and everlasting life on earth.—Rev. 21:3-5

After Jesus’ resurrection, when he appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, he began to speak as a stranger to them about the prophecies of God. He asked them, “Ought not Christ to

have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26) The entire Messiah—or Christ class—must finish its suffering. Then the glory phase in its fullness will follow, which will consummate in the blessing of "all families of the earth" in the most complete and lasting sense.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

One of the ways in which Jesus "set the LORD always before" him was through his prayer life. We have an account which brings out this point, when he healed many in the city of Capernaum, including Peter's mother-in-law. (Mark 1:21-33) Verse 34 reads, "He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." The account then says that before daybreak the next morning, while his disciples still slept, Jesus "went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." (vs. 35) Undoubtedly he was thanking the Father for the miracles he had performed the day before. He humbly recognized and acknowledged that these were done by the power of God. It was only because God was at his "right hand" that he could carry out these wonderful miracles.

The scriptural account continues, "And they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." (vss. 36-38) Here Jesus desired to show the disciples that his commission to preach the Gospel, and the miracles he performed, were a foretaste of the glory and work of the Messiah in the next age. It was in this way that he desired

to identify himself—the great “Deliverer” of Israel and all mankind—to those whom God would call to be his disciples.—Rom. 11:26

PROOF GIVEN TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

Proof of Jesus as the long-promised Messiah is brought out in the record concerning his predecessor, John the Baptist, who had been cast into prison by Herod. (Luke 3:19,20) Sensing that he might be soon put to death, John became concerned as to whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. His present circumstances seemed out of keeping with what he expected to happen. The righteous should not be destroyed, John thought, when the Messiah would come to establish God’s kingdom in Israel.

John knew from his father, Zacharias, and his mother, Elisabeth, that Jesus was the Messiah. He knew that the angel, Gabriel, told this wonderful truth to his mother’s cousin, Mary, the mother of Jesus. (Luke 1:26-33,67-79) Now, however, John was in prison, and he perhaps wondered if something had gone wrong. The account states that John called two of his own disciples, and “sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?”—Luke 7:19

Jesus’ response to John’s disciples was immediate and reassuring. “In that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.” (vss. 21,22) The Lord

knew these signs would allay John's uncertainty that he was the Messiah.

RAISING THE "PRISONERS"

A remarkable account is given to us in the Scriptures which gives evidence of our Lord's awareness of his Father's presence, and how fully he realized that all he accomplished was done through the power of God. It is the beautiful story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In this account, recorded in the 11th chapter of John, Jesus was informed that his dear friend Lazarus was very sick. At the time, he was some distance from Bethany where Lazarus lived. The messengers who had been sent to Jesus knew he loved Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, and were no doubt puzzled about his hesitancy to immediately go back to their home in Bethany. (vss. 1-3) Verse 4 says that when Jesus learned of Lazarus' illness, he said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

When Jesus finally arrived at the home, Lazarus had already died. The first person he met was Martha. As she came out to meet Jesus, her strong faith was exhibited by her response to him. Jesus said to her, "Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ [Hebrew: *Messiah*], the Son of God, which should come into the world."—vss. 23-27

Jesus then met Mary, who was distraught with grief and was in a highly emotional state because of her sorrow. He asked, "Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! . . . Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days."—vss. 32-39

"Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And 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. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth." (vss. 41-44) The mourners standing there saw their family member, friend, and neighbor, come from the grave, "bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." We cannot begin to fully contemplate what that scene was like, and how Mary, Martha, and Lazarus must have rejoiced together as they returned to their home.

Prior to this incident Jesus had awakened others from the sleep of death. However, this was the first time he had raised from the dead one who had literally been laid in the grave, "bound hand and foot with graveclothes." Here was an example that could be likened to setting free a prisoner who had been taken "captive" by man's great enemy—death. In Bible language the term "prison" is used to

symbolically describe the grave—that is, the condition of death. The raising of Lazarus was, in a special sense, a reassuring promise that the time would come when the Messiah would call forth “the prisoners from the prison.” (Isa. 42:6,7; 49:8,9; 61:1) Perhaps the disciples asked Jesus whether others would also be brought back from this “prison,” then remembered his words on a previous occasion, “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear [the Son of man’s] voice, And shall come forth.”—John 5:28,29

“I SHALL NOT BE MOVED”

Thus we recognize that Christ Jesus, because of his awareness of the place God had for him in his plan, had set the Father always before him. He knew that everything he did throughout the period of his ministry was done by the clear instructions of God, and by his power. Jesus knew that whatever happened to him, he could accept it as from God. He learned obedience and was made perfect—fully complete—by the things which he suffered.—Heb. 2:10; 5:8

In the hours before his crucifixion, anticipating the severity of what lay ahead of him, Jesus realized that he must pour out the incense of his love and devotion completely and perfectly. As he endured these fiery trials, he recognized that his offering must continue to be a “sweetsmelling savour,” even unto death. (Eph. 5:2) Knowing this, Jesus said to Peter, “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”—John 18:11

Obedience and submission to God’s will are also required of Jesus’ footstep followers. As imperfect

beings, we cannot perform perfectly, but must seek to bring our intentions into harmony with our Heavenly Father as fully as possible. By God's grace, we have been permitted to have an understanding of his plan and our relationship to it, and must be determined that we shall "not be moved" from fulfilling our part faithfully, "to the glory of God."—
II Cor. 4:15 ■