

Thanksgiving unto God Forever

*“Blessing, and
glory, and wisdom,
and thanksgiving,
and honour, and
power, and might,
be unto our God for
ever and ever.
Amen.”*

—*Revelation 7:12*

IT HAS BEEN A LONG AND

difficult journey for our country since the first designated day of Thanksgiving was celebrated by our forefathers at Plymouth colony nearly four hundred years ago.

The population of our land has increased to 325 million people. Historically speaking, the country has fought in many wars. The Revolutionary War won freedom from the mother country of Great Britain. There was the Civil War between the North and the South, the Spanish-American War, the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. More recently there have been the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the United States continues to fight the ongoing war against terrorism. Through all these unpleasant experiences, many have lost faith in the existence of a loving God whose providences overrule in their lives.

Still, however, the custom of observing a national day of thanksgiving continues. Certainly those who

rejoice in a knowledge of the true and loving God, and his plans, are happy to take advantage of this special occasion for giving thanks. We recognize, of course, that it is our privilege as consecrated believers to give thanks to the Heavenly Father every day for his tender watch care over all our affairs. We know that while he may permit us to pass through difficult experiences, he is overruling these circumstances so that all things may work together for our good, as those “called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

The Apostle Paul wrote, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (I Thess. 5:18) To properly give thanks “in every thing” means that every day will be one of thanksgiving. It means that we will not thank the Lord merely for those things which contribute to our immediate well-being and joy, but also for the trials which he permits to test and to develop us as footstep followers of Christ.

FOR HIS SON

There are certain abiding blessings in our lives as Christians for which we should daily give thanks. One is the fact that our Heavenly Father gave his “only begotten Son” to be our Redeemer and Savior. (John 3:16) In II Corinthians 9:15, the Apostle Paul writes, “Thanks be unto God for his inestimable gift.” (*Twentieth Century New Testament*) This inestimable gift is Jesus, the one “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”—Heb. 7:26

We have many reasons to be thankful for Jesus. He is not only our Savior and Redeemer, but also the captain of our salvation; our elder brother; our

great high priest; our advocate with the Father; our good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep; and our friend. In due time, at the marriage of the Lamb, he will be our heavenly bridegroom.—Tit. 2:13,14; Heb. 2:10,11; 4:14; I John 2:1; John 10:11; 15:14,15; Rev. 19:7

We should be thankful for the assurance that we will be given the necessary strength and courage to continue on in the narrow way of sacrifice and service, and, by God's grace, will attain victory and the crown of life. Paul wrote, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." (II Cor. 2:14, *New American Standard Bible*) If we are dwelling in God's favor, humbly serving him, we cannot lose, but are sure to be victorious. Hence, we can say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. 15:57

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

Giving thanks to God for his many blessings is an important aspect of prayer, and is properly a part of all our petitions to him. By way of example, Paul had learned from a fellow worker, Epaphras, of the love and zeal of the brethren at Colosse. He wrote to them, saying, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his

glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:9-12

What a wonderful summary this is of God’s blessings upon those whose chief desire and purpose is to know and to do his will. These are the ones whom God has made “meet,” or suitable, to partake of the “inheritance of the saints in light.” Truly, this is a cause for thanksgiving to all who have heard the invitation to the High Calling, and who have responded in terms of full devotion to God and to his will.

Another focus of our thanksgiving should be toward the truth concerning God and his great plan of the ages. It is through our understanding of this truth and its power that we are invited to take up our cross and follow the Master. It is by the application of its noble principles in our daily life that we are assured of victory, which will result in the glorious privilege of living and reigning with Christ as priests and kings unto God.—Rev. 5:10; 20:6

FOR THE BRETHREN

As already noted, one of Paul’s outstanding reasons for thanksgiving was his brethren in Christ. He appreciated and loved his brethren, and not only did he pray for them, but daily he gave thanks to God for what they meant to him. One of the outstanding examples of this is in his expression of love to the brethren at Philippi. He wrote, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he

which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”—Phil. 1:3-6

There is a special tenderness expressed in this message of greeting to the brethren at Philippi. “I thank my God,” Paul said, “upon every remembrance of you.” He assures these brethren that he remembered them in every prayer, and that he had been doing this from the “first day until now.” Apparently Paul held very fond memories of that first day, and well he might, for it was indeed a blessed day. Philippi was Paul’s first stop in Europe, as he responded to the call which had come to him in a vision, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”—Acts 16:9

Paul and his companions, responding to this call, went to the city of Philippi, “the chief city of that part of Macedonia.” There they remained for a few days, and “on the sabbath,” the account explains, “we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spoke unto the women which resorted thither.” Among these was a “woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, . . . which worshipped God.”—Acts 16:12-14

Verse 14 continues, stating that Lydia’s heart was opened by the Lord, and that she gave attention to the things which were spoken by Paul. This was genuine interest. She was baptized, together with her household, and then said to Paul and his fellow-workers, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”—vs. 15

That was the “first day” mentioned by Paul, when he gave thanks to God for these brethren at Philippi. Truly it was a wonderful day! Imagine at the present time going into an area where, as a result of bearing

witness to the Truth, a group of brethren would become interested and furnish a meeting place for the start of an ecclesia. Surely Paul must have been assured that his affirmative response to the call, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us,” had been blessed by the Lord. Indeed, he had received this additional evidence that God was directing his steps.

IN THE GOSPEL

Paul thanked God for the “fellowship in the gospel” which he enjoyed with the Philippian brethren from that first day. The *Revised Standard Version* more properly uses the word “partnership” instead of “fellowship.” The brethren at Philippi were faithful partners with Paul in the great cause of promoting the Gospel. Their mutual discussions of various aspects of the Truth were surely part of their fellowship. However, they did more than talk about the Truth. They went out and proclaimed it to others, so that those to whom the Lord gave “ears to hear,” could have an opportunity to rejoice together with them.—Matt. 13:9,16

Brethren in Christ today enjoy this same partnership, for the promotion of the Gospel continues, and will do so until the last members of the body of Christ have passed beyond the veil. This should be one of our great causes for gratitude this coming Thanksgiving Day, and every day of every year, as we continue to witness for Jesus and for the Word of God. Are we thankful for our brethren even as Paul was—thankful for their partnership in the promotion of the Gospel? Do we rejoice in our partnership with the brethren, or are we hesitant about becoming involved (Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 31) in their works of sacrifice in the promulgation of the message of truth?

We, at The Dawn are particularly thankful for our brethren throughout the world. This is especially true as we consider the wonderful manner in which those who love the Gospel message continue to labor together for the promotion of the Truth. Like the Apostle Paul, we thank our God upon every remembrance of the manner in which our brethren throughout the world continue to enthusiastically lay down their lives in the work of the harvest. Our partnership in the Gospel with brethren everywhere is indeed heartening, and we daily give thanks for the goodness of the Lord in permitting us to enjoy this blessed fellowship.

THE LORD HAS BLESSED

We are thankful, too, for the many evidences that our labor together in the Lord has not been in vain. We continue to see those, here and there, who have been brought into contact with the Truth through the cooperative efforts of the brethren, and are themselves now rejoicing in their knowledge of the wisdom, justice, love, and power of our loving Heavenly Father. What a joy it is to note the love and enthusiasm of those whose hearts are still aglow with self-sacrificing zeal for the Lord and for his people!

That “first love” spirit of sacrifice and devotion to the Lord and to his cause should remain with us. What disappointment would be ours if we permit it to cool off to any degree. (Rev. 2:4) There is no valid reason why it should. Indeed, as we become better acquainted with our Heavenly Father and note daily his overruling providences in our lives,

our love and faith should increase, and our joy in the Lord should abound yet more and more.

God has blessed every aspect of the work of proclaiming the simple and glorious “gospel of the kingdom,” and for this we are thankful. (Matt. 24:14) It is great cause for thankfulness to realize that so many of our partners in the vineyard are engaged in this work. It is a joy to realize that, through this “fellowship in the gospel,” the truth of God’s plan continues to go out via the printed page, radio and television, and many forms of electronic media on a worldwide scale.

GOD’S KEEPING POWER

To note the keeping power of God in the lives of his people is always great cause for thanksgiving. We rejoice to realize that our faith in the precious doctrines of truth remains firm, and that those doctrines have lost none of their luster. This is a special cause for thanksgiving in these days when there is so much chaos and uncertainty in the world among professing Christians.

It is true that we are still waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises respecting the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. That waiting period has been much longer than many of the Lord’s people expected. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,” wrote Solomon. (Prov. 13:12) However, this is true only if we lose sight of the vitality and validity of the precious doctrines of truth. We should remember that it is not God who is deferring our hopes, but our own lack of faith in his all-wise methods and ways.

The great fundamentals of the Truth are the same, and therefore should be just as precious today as they

have ever been. God is in full control of the timetable of events in the outworking of the details of his great plan of the ages. Let us be thankful for this, realizing that our faith and patience are being tested, and these are critical elements of Christian character. How appropriate are the words of Jeremiah: “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”—Lam. 3:26

The salvation in which we are now particularly interested is that “great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Heb. 2:3) This “great salvation” includes the future opportunity of living and reigning with Christ for the blessing of all the families of the earth. That blessing will be the salvation of mankind and the restoration of the willing and obedient to human perfection and life on the earth forever. (Acts 3:20-25) How thankful we are for the blessed prospect of sharing in the great project of offering this salvation to mankind, awakening all the dead from the sleep of death, and helping them traverse the “way of holiness” to full perfection.—Isa. 35:8

Finally, we are truly thankful that in this time when the hearts of the people are filled with fear because of the chaotic conditions throughout the earth, God, through his Word, has revealed to us the meaning of current world events. Present conditions most assuredly indicate that the Messianic kingdom is indeed near at hand. Truly, as Jesus admonished, because we see these things, we lift up our heads with confidence and thanksgiving, knowing that our deliverance into the kingdom is drawing near!—Luke 21:28, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* ■