

Reviving the Contrite

*“To this man will I
look, even to him
that is poor and of
a contrite spirit,
and trembleth
at my word.”
—Isaiah 66:2*

THE PROPHET ISAIAH

records the ultimate purpose our Heavenly Father has in establishing his kingdom of blessings to Israel and all nations, of which he speaks in Isaiah 66:10-12,22,23. In

our opening text, God also makes clear the type of individual he is looking for to be associated with his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, and sharing with him in the rulership of that righteous kingdom. These must first of all possess a disposition that is marked by having a “poor” and “contrite spirit.” God has been looking for those who could be molded and fashioned to his eternal will and purpose. They must also love and reverence his Holy Word of Truth. Reverence is the thought conveyed by the word “trembleth” in this verse.

THE BRUISED

The word “contrite” in our opening text is translated from a Hebrew word which means “stricken”

or “smitten.” It may thus fittingly point to individuals whose hearts are repentant in respect to their own shortcomings, and who acknowledge the lofty standards of the Most High God. Those who are contrite realize their own littleness, unworthiness, and imperfection, and are emptied of self-confidence and self-esteem. These specially called ones of God are thus more readily submissive to the direction of the divine will in their lives instead of their own. A heart that is contrite also has a quiet and deep sense of sorrow for that which is not in harmony with the standards of truth and righteousness. God’s promise is that he will revive the poor and contrite in both their spirit and their hearts. To such he is ever near to assist them in their walk in newness of life.

THE HUMBLE MINDED

The word “poor” in our Scripture relates to those who are humble-minded, lowly in spirit, and afflicted. Again, the prophet wrote, “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”—Isa. 57:15

The great God of the universe inhabits eternity and is the one from whom all life has come and from whom all blessings flow. (Ps. 89:6-12; I Cor. 8:6) Yet, his ever watchful eye is directed toward those whom he has called from a sin-sick world and invited to share with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom of truth and life for the benefit and blessing of his human creation. (Ps. 34:15; I Pet. 3:12)

They are the poor and contrite ones of this world. They love our Heavenly Father and eagerly search his wonderful “exceeding great and precious promises” as they have been recorded in his precious Word—the Bible.—II Pet. 1:4

REFRESHING

The word “revive” in Isaiah 57:15 indicates the giving of new breath and life to the Lord’s people. The Holy Spirit of God is designed to restore, refresh, and satisfy the very life of the true followers of Christ. It applies to those whose hearts are repentant, in total harmony with, and submissive to, the divine will.

The prophet wrote, “Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” (Isa. 40:10,11) The Heavenly Father’s beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, is the “arm” of God in carrying out his will and purpose. He is also the Good Shepherd, who will feed his Father’s “little flock” with spiritual food and sustenance and guide them in the narrow way. Since the Day of Pentecost, Jesus has been gathering his sheep together into one fold and gently leading them in their Christian journey.—Luke 12:32; John 10:14,15

Isaiah also said that God would give strength to the faint of heart. “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:28-31

The promise that God would revive his poor and contrite people was also addressed by the Psalmist David. He wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” (Ps. 51:10-12) Exercising the “right spirit” within us begins in the mind. The renewing, or renovation, of our minds is a vital part of our Christian development as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Rom. 12:2; II Cor. 5:17

David then said, “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.” (Ps. 51:15-19) Such “sacrifices of righteousness” are rich in holiness and fragrant in grace.

JESUS—THE ARM OF JEHOVAH

When our Lord Jesus humbly presented himself to his Heavenly Father in total consecration to the

doing of his will, he was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. In Matthew's record of the event, after Jesus had been lowered into the water, we read, "When he was baptized, [he] 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. 3:13-17

Having received the Holy Spirit from on high, and hearing his Father's wonderful words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," Jesus was thus assured of his acceptance and the Father's loving care on his behalf. Afterward, he was in the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights and was tempted by Satan, the Devil. "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." (Matt. 4:1-11) Thus began the earthly portion of Jesus' work as God's holy arm.

A GREAT LIGHT

From the scriptural account, we read, "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."—Matt. 4:12-17

During our Lord's earthly sojourn, he taught his faithful disciples by way of symbols, parables, and prophetic language. Early in his ministry, and after an exhaustive day of ministering to the multitudes, Jesus retired with his disciples to a place where he could be alone with them. In his first message to them, he spoke of the lowly and contrite ones who would respond to his teachings.

WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE

We read in Matthew's Gospel account, "Seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:1-3) These wonderful words of life concerned the disciples' everlasting welfare. They were now prospective members of the future "kingdom of heaven," and Jesus emphasized the disposition that would help them make their calling and election sure. The "poor in spirit," the Master knew, will readily submit themselves to the divine will and discipline of an all-wise and loving Heavenly Father.

Jesus used the word "blessed" to point to the permanent comfort and joy that true Christians experience when they have attained a character that is in harmony with our loving Heavenly Father. It is the blessed hope of our high calling in Christ Jesus of which Paul spoke in his letter to Titus. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—Tit. 2:11-13

HE COMFORTS THE MOURNERS

Jesus then told his disciples, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4) He was addressing those who are in sorrow and are especially grieved in spirit. To comfort suggests solace, to be consoled or encouraged. This blessedness applies to those who, because of their own difficult experiences, possess a sympathetic nature and who are touched with compassion for the sorrow and pain of others.

This distinguishing mark of character especially identifies our Lord Jesus. “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.”—Isa. 53:3-5

Jesus bore our grief and carried our sorrows. This endearing mark of character reminds us of the attitude of heart and mind that he displayed at the tomb of Lazarus. He wept on that occasion because of his deep and sympathetic character. (John 11:32-36) As we walk in newness of life, let us also strive to be more like him. May we be comforted, and ready to comfort others, by remembering these words of Paul: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”—II Cor. 1:3-6

PROMISES TO THE MEEK

Jesus also brought to his disciples’ attention the importance of possessing a meek spirit. He said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) This characteristic points to a mildness of disposition and the spirit of gentleness. It is not easily provoked or irritated, and forebears injury or annoyance. The Master is our best example, and we do well to be encouraged by him, who said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”—Matt. 11:29

A meek and gentle spirit is one that is more easily taught, and that readily submits to the will of God. The Apostle James wrote, “Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, God opposes the proud but gives grace unto the humble. So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”—James 4:5-7, *New Living Translation*

Jesus said that the meek would “inherit the earth.” This promise will take place after the “present evil world” has ended, and Christ’s kingdom is established. (Gal. 1:4) The psalmist wrote, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”—Ps. 2:1-8

THIRST AND HUNGER SATISFIED

Another of our Lord Jesus’ lessons is, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) This suggests a humble disposition that longs for truth and righteousness, and to be taught of God. It is centered in a growing faith and a desire to please our loving Heavenly Father. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” “Early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Ps. 42:1,2; 63:1) These will surely “be filled” as promised by the Master.

MERCY AND PURITY OF HEART

Another of the traits most desirable for the Lord's people to attain is mercy. Being merciful is a Christlike principle, and Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. 5:7) This applies to those who recognize their own need of divine mercy in their lives. God will extend his mercy toward us in proportion to our willingness to be merciful and more generous to others. The heart that is more generous, loving, and merciful is therefore "blessed" because it is living closer to God and his standards of righteousness.

None of the Lord's people can ever hope to obtain absolute perfection of conduct, thought, or word, but our loving Father looks on the intention of the heart. Those who have honest and pure hearts filled with the spirit of holiness are especially desirable to the Heavenly Father. Thus our Lord Jesus taught, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."—vs. 8

The promise is that those who possess this mark of Christian character will see God. Thus do we read, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—I John 3:1-3

CHILDREN OF GOD

Jesus was surely a man of peace, and at the beginning of his earthly ministry he taught his disciples,

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:9) At the conclusion of his Father’s work and as he was about to leave his disciples, he said to them, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27

The peacemakers will be called the “children of God.” They are called from a sin-sick world and led by the Holy Spirit of God for their perfecting in righteousness. “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:12-14) “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”—Heb. 12:14

TESTING NECESSARY

When Jesus was finishing his lesson he added these sobering words: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

Jesus was reviled that he might demonstrate his loyalty to God and the principles of righteousness. We should consider it a privilege to share in his sufferings. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some

strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." —I Pet. 4:12-14

Much in the way of spiritual strength is required to rejoice in sufferings and reproaches. When writing to the brethren at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul encouraged them along this line. He said, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: ... Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."—Eph. 6:5-7,10

NOT MANY WISE OR NOBLE

The ultimate plan of reconciliation for the sin-sick human family appears foolish to the minds of most people. Paul said, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."—I Cor. 1:25,26

During this present time, God is seeking those who are insignificant from the world's standpoint—the meek, humble, and contrite—who can learn from him and have their minds transformed to the pattern of his beloved Son. James said, "Hath not

God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"—James 2:5

THE WEAK CONFOUND THE WISE

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul further proclaimed, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption [or deliverance]: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."—I Cor. 1:27-31

The power of truth confounds the worldly-wise in the hands of God's weakest people. He thus hinders the pride and vainglory of men. "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." (I Cor. 4:10) Thus we should not be surprised that God's consecrated children who are striving to make their calling and election sure are counted as "fools" by many in the world.

If we are of those who are contrite and of humble disposition, and are faithful unto death, we will share with our Lord Jesus in blessing all the families of the earth in Christ's future kingdom. (Rev. 2:10; Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25) Therefore, let us strive to follow each day the sentiments of these words: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every

man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”—Rom. 12:3 ■