

God's Thoughts Toward Us

“Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”
—Psalm 40:5

IN REVEALING HIS WILL to consecrated believers of this Gospel Age, the Heavenly Father has made it plain that he wants them to work for him and with him in the carrying out of his plan. God's only begotten Son, in his prehuman existence, had this glorious opportunity in the original work of creation, hence we find Jehovah saying to him, “Let us make man in our image, after our like-

ness.” (Gen. 1:26) How wonderful it would be to have the Lord similarly include us in his work! This is exactly what he has done, for as the apostle writes, we have been made colaborers with God in the great work of reconciling the lost world to him. —I Cor. 3:9; II Cor. 5:19; 6:1

Jehovah has been zealous in the carrying forward of his plan, and he is pleased when his colaborers

exhibit a similar zeal. The footstep followers of the Master are described by Paul as a “peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Tit. 2:14) James indicates that we are to show our faith by our works. (James 2:18) It is undoubtedly pleasing to the Heavenly Father that we should rejoice in this privilege of working with him, and that we should be happy at every evidence of his blessing upon our efforts.

At the same time, we should ever keep in mind that what we do for the Lord is nothing in comparison with what he does for us. Truly, it is only by his grace that our imperfect works are acceptable to him at all. It seems appropriate, therefore, that we turn aside for a little while and consider the many “wonderful works” which he has done, and his solicitous “thoughts which are to us-ward,” as spoken of in our opening text. When we do this, we find how true it is that the many things which the Lord has done “cannot be reckoned up in order,” and that when we try to tell about them “they are more than can be numbered.”

“HE INCLINED UNTO ME”

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry,” writes David in the first verse of the Psalm from which our text is taken. Throughout the ages millions, no doubt, have waited patiently for the Lord, yet it was not his due time to “incline” unto them and hear their cry. Indeed, many of these lacked understanding in their waiting. Paul speaks of them as the “whole creation,” which, groaning and travailing together in pain are waiting “for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:19,22) God knows about all

these millions, and when, in his plan, their day of visitation comes, he will incline unto them, hear their cries for help, and will save them. Then they will say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." —Isa. 25:9

Meanwhile, during this present Gospel Age, the Lord has honored one here and there by responding to their cry. Paul speaks of these as seeking the Lord, "if haply they might feel after him, and find him." (Acts 17:27) It would be impossible for any to find the Lord unless he chooses to incline, or draw near to them, and to respond to their cry for help. Therefore, if we have had this blessed experience of finding him, it means that his thoughts have turned to "us-ward," and that we can accept this as a manifestation of his special favor.

When God inclined toward us, what was the first of his wonderful works on our behalf? David gives us the answer, saying, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." (Ps. 40:2) We were all in this "horrible pit," symbolic of our being lost in sin and death. We remember the literal pit into which Joseph was cast by his brethren. It was a place from which he could not have escaped. Had his brethren not changed their minds and sold Joseph as a slave, he would have died in that pit.

We were indeed in a symbolic pit from which escape was impossible and made the more so by the miry clay into which we were sinking. It was in this condition that God found us and heard our cry for help. He not only listened, but he took hold of us

and lifted us up out of the miry clay and out of the pit and set our feet upon a rock—“that Rock was Christ.” (I Cor. 10:4) Then we had a firm footing, a sure foundation, and joyfully we could sing:

“On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.”

Then God’s thoughts toward us began to be manifested in further blessings. David writes that the Lord “established” his “goings”—that is, his course in life, and that applies to us with equal force. While we were in the horrible pit, and our feet were sinking in the miry clay, life had very little purpose. Many times the question probably arose in our minds as to the meaning of our existence. We had no set objective, and we likely vacillated from one notion to another. All this changed, however, when God set our feet upon the Rock, Christ Jesus.

Realizing that God had made a wonderful provision for us through Christ, our hearts responded in loving devotion to him. We knew that we no longer were our own, but belonged to him, and thus should spend the remainder of our lives serving him. We consecrated, or dedicated, ourselves to do his will, and in revealing his will to us, our Heavenly Father established our “goings.” That is, he pointed out not only what he wanted us to do in his service, but also that at the end of the way, if we would be “faithful unto death,” we would receive a “crown of life” in the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 2:10; 20:6) Therefore God invited us to set our “affection on things above,” and to “run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”—Col. 3:2; Heb. 12:1,2

Now life had a new meaning, and a definite objective. We had a job to do. We were to “work out” our salvation, for we knew that God was working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12,13) Being thus established, we were ready to “give diligence” to make our “calling and election sure,” and with Paul, we said, “This one thing I do.” (II Pet. 1:10; Phil. 3:13) We heard Jesus saying to us, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” and hearing this, we realized that we could not afford to be halfhearted in striving for the goal that was set before us in the Gospel. (Matt. 6:33) Moreover, we rejoiced when we remembered that it was God’s thoughts toward us that had resulted in our being in this position of high favor with him, a position in which we rejoiced “in hope of the glory of God.”—Rom. 5:2

A NEW SONG

“He hath put a new song in my mouth,” David continues, “even praise unto our God.” (Ps. 40:3) The song in the mouths of most in the world today is a very sad one, if indeed they have a song at all. It was so with us until we were lifted up out of that “horrible pit.” How could we sing while our feet were sinking in the “miry clay?” Now it is different. God has given us a song to sing, one of praise to him. This new song is in reality the melody of the Truth found in God’s Word. Various symbols are used in the Bible to help us comprehend the full meaning of the Gospel of Christ. It is water, the “living water.” It is a protection against evil, “the armor of God.” It is the “light” with which the Lord has shined into our hearts.—John 4:10-14; Eph. 6:11-18; II Cor. 4:6

The song symbolism suggests the wonderful harmony of the various principles of Truth, and the melody of the promises and prophecies of the Scriptures. It is described by the Apostle John as a “new song” and “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” (Rev. 14:3; 15:2,3) This latter reference depicts those who sing this song as standing on a “sea of glass mingled with fire,” which undoubtedly symbolizes the position of the faithful people of God, those who have “gotten the victory,” John says. They enjoy, as do those also who are striving to gain the same victory, the vantage point given them by a knowledge of God’s plan. To these, the “sea” with its roaring, which so disturbs and frightens the world, is transparent. They see its purpose, and that beyond the trouble will come the glorious new day of blessing for all mankind.

Thus, they sing this new song, the song of Moses and the Lamb. This melody, beginning with the testimony of Moses, and ending with the revelation of Jesus Christ, is one gloriously harmonious theme of divine wisdom, justice, love and power as revealed in Jehovah’s plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth. It is this new song of Truth that the Lord has put into our mouths, and its sweet sound proclaims the blessings to be showered upon both the church and the world. Its very nature can do no less than cause us to show forth, Peter says, the “praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

Continuing in Psalm 40:3, David says, “Many shall see it, and fear [reverence], and shall trust in the LORD.” We know that ultimately the whole world will come to reverence and trust in God, as they gain an

understanding of his true character and plan. Even now, many see and appreciate his Word to some extent, while one here and one there embrace it in full consecration and run diligently toward the “mark for the prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) To whatever extent an individual sees the Truth of the Gospel message and appreciates it, his reverence for and trust in the Lord is increased. What a blessing that is in this time of distress upon the nations!

The psalmist says, “Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust.” (Ps. 40:4) Today, one after another of the things in which men have put their trust are failing. Their idols are crumbling, and, symbolically speaking, they are calling for the “rocks” and the “mountains” to fall on and protect them. (Rev. 6:16) What a joy, therefore, it should be to us if in singing the new song of praise to God, and in putting forth the message of the Gospel of the kingdom, some hear and learn to put their trust in God, realizing that only in the fulfillment of his promises will peace and joy come to the world.

OUR JUSTIFICATION

It was to “us-ward” that God was thinking when he made it possible for us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, with the assurance that our offering would be holy and acceptable to him through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 12:1) “Being justified by faith,” Paul writes, “we have peace with God.” (Rom. 5:1) In the “horrible pit” and “miry clay” we were alienated from God, but his thoughts toward us made provision for our return to harmony and peace with him. “While we were yet sinners,” the apostle continues, “Christ died for us.” (vs. 8) It is beyond

our ability to fully understand why God would make provision for our being at peace with him; but it is so, and by this loving thought of the Creator toward us we are overwhelmed.

Paul further explains that by justification through Christ “we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) This grace is that wonderful position of favor in which we rejoice in “hope of the glory of God.” We cannot truly grasp the totality of this hope. Yet, we know that God’s thoughts were “us-ward” in making this provision, for the Apostle Peter explains that by the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God we have the hope of being made “partakers of the divine nature.”—II Pet. 1:4

THE HOLY SPIRIT

God has also given us his Holy Spirit, another evidence of his thoughts toward us. What does the Holy Spirit do for us? The Scriptures explain that by it we are begotten to a new hope of life; that we are taught by means of this anointing and thus authorized to be servants of God; that the Holy Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God; and by the Holy Spirit we are “sealed unto the day of redemption,” or deliverance.—I Pet. 1:3; I John 2:27; Rom. 8:16; Eph. 4:30

God does all these things for us, and more, through the operation of his Holy Spirit in our lives. By that Spirit we are also guided in the narrow way; comforted in our sorrows; enlightened when the way seems dark; strengthened when weary; corrected when wayward; and warned when in danger. How wonderful is the Master’s assurance that the

Heavenly Father is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children.—Luke 11:13

GOD'S ARMOR AND FORTRESS

Even though our feet are firmly established upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, we are surrounded by enemies. Satan as a roaring lion is seeking to destroy us. (I Pet. 5:8) In addition, we have to contend against the opposition of the world and also fight against the foes within, that is, our own fallen flesh. However, we need not fear. God's thoughts toward us have provided an "armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left."—II Cor. 6:7

Paul tells us that we need to put on this armor in order to stand in this evil day. It is the armor of God, and it affords complete protection if put on and properly used. There is the "helmet of salvation;" the "breastplate of righteousness;" the "shield of faith;" the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God;" the girdle of truth; and for our feet there is the "preparation of the gospel of peace." (Eph. 6:13-17) We could not ask for an armor more complete than this. With such an all-inclusive armor, we are able to fight the "good fight of faith" victoriously.—I Tim. 6:12

Not only has God provided an armor, but he has promised that he will be a "fortress" to us. David wrote, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." (Ps. 91:1,2) Surely we can put our trust in the most High, for here we have another reminder of his "us-ward" thoughts. Even before he inclined toward us and heard our cry

for help, he made every provision whereby we might “war a good warfare” as “soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and be victorious.—I Tim. 1:18; II Tim. 2:3

THE THRONE OF GRACE

In his thoughts toward us God knew that frequently we would need to commune with him in order to be reassured of his forgiveness and love, and to draw upon his grace to help in times of need. Thus, he made provision for this. He arranged that although sinful and imperfect, and by nature having no claims upon his grace, we could, through Jesus’ name, come into his presence to seek forgiveness, as well as to ask for his guidance and strength.—Heb. 4:16

Through his beloved Son, our Heavenly Father outlined the manner in which we should pray, and the things for which we should ask. We can pray for the coming of his kingdom, and for our daily bread, temporal and spiritual. Through Christ we can ask for divine forgiveness, provided we forgive those who trespass against us. We can claim his promise not to lead us into temptation, but to deliver us from the evil that threatens every day, and to help us attain unto the “first resurrection,” to live and reign with Christ.—Rev. 20:6

God has promised to supply all our needs, and for them all we can pray. (Phil. 4:19) How loving were his thoughts to us in making the provision of prayer. As New Creatures it is our lifeline to God. It is our means of communication whereby we keep contact with divine source of wisdom, strength, and courage to go on in the narrow way, to continue the “good fight” and to “press toward the mark.” “Prayer keeps the Christian’s armor bright,” wrote

the poet, and “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.”

Surely the psalmist was right when he said that God’s thoughts toward us are so many and varied that they “cannot be reckoned up in order,” and are “more than can be numbered.” In his love he thought of all our needs from before the time he called us, even until we reach the end of the way; and beyond that, provided us the hope of “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) He inclined toward us with mercy and love to forgive, guide, strengthen, protect, encourage, comfort, and inspire us with a heavenly hope. Daily, as he lifts up his countenance upon us to give peace and the assurance that his thoughts continue to “us-ward,” God invites us to commune with him so we may become more intimately acquainted with his character and plan, and thus rejoice the more that we are so richly blessed in being members of his divine family.

“LO, I COME”

Returning to our lesson in the 40th Psalm, verses 7 and 8 read: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” This passage is quoted by the Apostle Paul and applied to Jesus, describing his spirit of consecration. (Heb. 10:7,9) Many of the Old Testament promises and prophecies concerning Jesus apply also to the members of his body; that is, they refer to the entire Christ class. It seems reasonable that the 40th Psalm is one of these. Jesus personally did not need to be lifted up out of a horrible pit and from the miry clay. However, those who become members of his

symbolic “body” do thus need to be rescued from sin and condemnation, so he is represented as speaking for all those whom he “is not ashamed to call ... brethren.”—Heb. 2:11

It was Jesus, the Head of this little company whom the Heavenly Father so specially loved, who set the example of full devotion to God, as represented by the expression, “Lo, I come: ... to do thy will.” This also should be the spirit of our devotion. The loving-kindness of our God should induce us to be ever more determined that all our thoughts, words and deeds will be such only as are in harmony with his will, hence pleasing to him.

It may be difficult, at times, for our faith to grasp the reality of the love of God, and the fullness with which his thoughts have been toward us. In this connection it will help if we remember that Jesus, our Head, was the first to have this love bestowed upon him, and that the Father’s love for us is because we are all “one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) Jesus mentions this in his prayer to God on behalf of his footstep followers, saying, “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26) Let us, then, never doubt that God thinks about us, loves us, and cares for us. He loved Jesus, who was daily his delight, and Jesus prayed that this same love be manifested toward us. Truly we are a favored people!

GOD’S LOVINGKINDNESS NOT CONCEALED

In the Psalm, Jesus is represented as saying, “I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation:

I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.” (Ps. 40:10) How true this was of Jesus, God’s “faithful and true witness.” (Rev. 3:14) It should also be true of us, for Jesus is our example, and we are walking in his steps. How can we keep from declaring the faithfulness and lovingkindness of him whose “us-ward” thoughts have filled our lives with blessings so rich and bountiful? Such is especially so since we have learned that God has also made provision for the ultimate blessing of all the families of the earth.

In another place the psalmist writes, “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.” (Ps. 92:1,2) Indeed, this is the only thing we can properly do if we truly appreciate what the Lord has done for us. It should be a joy to show forth God’s praises! We can do this because he has put a new song in our mouths—the new song of truth and righteousness; the song of God’s plan of salvation for both the church and the world; the “song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”

It is a wonderful song, a beautiful story of divine love which seems each time we tell it more wonderfully sweet. Let us, then, not conceal this song in our hearts, but sing it aloud, and thus let the people near and far know how wonderful our God is, and that his loving-kindness will yet be known throughout all the earth. Who shall not praise God when his righteous thoughts and acts are not only toward those who believe now, but are made manifest toward “all nations” and people, the entire human race!—Rev. 15:4 ■