

The Dawn

A Herald of Christ's Presence

OCTOBER 2021





People of the Bible

*“Now these things happened to them as
an example . . . for our instruction.”
1 Corinthians 10:11*

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The Resurrection

—Firstfruits and Afterfruits—

*“Now is Christ
risen from the
dead, and become
the firstfruits of
them that slept.”*

—*I Corinthians 15:20*

AS WE CONTINUE TO SEE

humanity struggle in the grip of the Adamic curse of sin and death, we should find comfort from God’s holy Word of Truth. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Both the gift of the only begotten Son of God as man’s Redeemer, and his resurrection from death as confirmed in our opening text, are of vital importance in the great plan of the ages which the Creator is working out for the ultimate blessing of the human race.

The Bible assures us that God’s purposes will all be carried through to a successful conclusion. (Isa. 55:11) It was the Father’s plan that Jesus would give up his perfect human life to redeem Adam and his posterity. (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:12,19; I Cor. 15:21,22) However, this was not enough to give renewed hope for life to humanity. Jesus would also have to be resurrected, for a dead Messiah would

be unable to complete the work of reconciling the world back to God.

INFALLIBLE PROOFS

The Bible informs us that Jesus, after his resurrection, showed himself to his apostles “by many infallible proofs” for forty days. (Acts 1:3) Paul later listed many of these, adding, “Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” (I Cor. 15:3-8) When Jesus showed himself to the other witnesses, he materialized in a body of flesh to enable them to see and commune with him, but a miracle of a distinctive character was performed in the case of Paul.

The Apostle John wrote, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) The entire church, including Paul, is promised a resurrection and exaltation to “glory and honour and immortality,” and association with Jesus, sharing his heavenly glory. (Rom. 2:7; 8:16,17) It is this that is involved in being “born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5,6) Upon spirit birth, it will be possible to see Jesus “as he is.” With respect to our human understanding, those who shall be of this class will be changed in the resurrection to a new nature, the divine nature.—Phil. 3:20,21; II Pet. 1:2-4

Paul explains, however, that he saw the resurrected Jesus as one “born out of due time.” In other words, Paul caught a glimpse of the divine Jesus even though he had not himself attained to Spirit birth. It was only a momentary view of the Master in his glory, and this was possible only by a miracle.

Even so, the brightness of that which he saw blinded Paul. It was a convincing testimony to him that Jesus had been raised from the dead, a testimony which, by supplementing that of the other “infallible” witnesses, served to substantiate this fundamental truth to all who had “ears to hear.”

Thus, with no uncertainty, Paul’s assurance has reached down through the centuries even to our day that “now is Christ risen from the dead.” This is a blessed truth, and belief in it is fundamental to being a Christian. Strange though it may seem, however, there have been some professed followers of Christ associated with the church who have not believed in the resurrection of the dead.

There were some of these in the church at Corinth, the group to which this wonderful chapter on the resurrection was written. (I Cor. 15:12) Paul indicates that these did not believe in the resurrection at all, and while possibly they had not applied their unbelief to Jesus, he shows that it would mean just this, for if in the plan of God, no provision is made for the resurrection of the dead, “then is Christ not risen.” Furthermore, the apostle adds, “if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”—vss. 13,14

Jesus died to redeem man from death, but a dead Redeemer could not restore those for whom he died. If Christ was not resurrected from death, there is no “seed” of promise to bless all the families of the earth, and no one to fulfill all the wonderful Messianic promises given by the prophets. (Gal. 3:8,16) If Christ was not raised, there can never be a worldwide kingdom of peace under his righteous

rulership. (Isa. 9:6,7; Rev. 11:15) How important indeed is the resurrection of Jesus in the out-working of God's purposes. This is a good example of how the entire plan of God stands together. We cannot reject a part of it without doing damage to the whole.

The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is in itself a marvelous truth, but its fullness of meaning is emphasized by Paul in the statement that he has "become the firstfruits of them that slept." Simply stated, this means that because Jesus was raised from the dead, all others who are asleep in death will be awakened—both the church class and the world—"every man in his own order." —I Cor. 15:23

FRUITS OF THE HARVEST

When discussing the hope of a future judgment period "in righteousness," which necessitates an awakening of the dead, Paul declared that God "hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him [Christ] from the dead." (Acts 17:31) As we have noted, the apostle says that Jesus became the "firstfruits of them that slept" in the death condition. This term—firstfruits—is very significant and is one that Paul borrowed from the Old Testament.

In the use of this symbolism, we have a further important truth brought to our attention. In the divine arrangements with the nation of Israel, the firstfruits of every harvest were given to God as an offering to him. (Lev. 23:9-11) This prefigured Jesus, who as the "firstfruits," was also offered to the Heavenly Father. It was, in his case, the offering of

himself, and in connection with this offering it was the divine will that he should die as the Redeemer of both the church and the world. Jesus was, symbolically speaking, “planted” in death, and as a grain of wheat, he fell into the ground. During his earthly ministry he explained that unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone and has no hope of producing fruitage. (John 12:24) Jesus, because of being planted in death, did not remain alone. He was raised from the dead and became the “firstfruits” of them that slept. Thus, there is to be a glorious harvest of all who are in their graves—the “afterfruits”—for in due time they will hear his voice and “shall come forth.”—John 5:28,29

In some Old Testament pictures reference is made to the “first of the firstfruits of thy land.” (Exod. 23:19) The Israelites saw the firstfruits as an indication and promise of a greater harvest still to come as the year progressed. Similarly, those who believe in the redemptive work of Jesus view him as the hope for the entire world of mankind to be restored to life, as God has promised through his Word. The foregoing Scripture also has a symbolic fulfillment. Jesus is the “first of the firstfruits,” for his true church is also spoken of as being of the firstfruits class. (James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) Like Jesus, these offer themselves to God, and are “planted together in the likeness” of Christ’s death. (Rom. 6:5) The entire firstfruits class is exalted to immortality in the “first resurrection,” having obtained the “glory of the celestial.”—Rev. 20:6; I Cor. 15:40

BRINGING FIRSTFRUITS

There is another lesson concerning firstfruits that we wish to consider. It is found in Leviticus 23:10, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.”—*New American Standard Bible*

This verse highlights Israel’s obligation to give God the firstfruits of the land of promise upon entering therein. Taking instruction from Paul’s statement that these things were an example for us, we look for the spiritual lesson in it. (I Cor. 10:11) As footstep followers of the Master, we dwell, in the spirit of our minds, in a land of promised rest, being assured, “We who have believed enter that rest.” (Heb. 4:3, *NASB*) Having entered this spiritual haven, what “firstfruits” do we have to offer our Heavenly Father?

First, we have been invited to offer ourselves, and have been guided in that work by the will of God. “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” (James 1:18, *NASB*) Further light is shed on the firstfruits by Paul. “We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”—Rom. 8:23, *NASB*

As alluded to in the foregoing verse, footstep followers of Christ enjoy a unique blessing. They are the first to bear the fruits of God’s Spirit. This fruitage is diverse in its manifestations. We are told, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal. 5:22,23, *NASB*) That such qualities of character can flourish abundantly in the present time of trial and difficulty is a glory to God. As Jesus stated, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” —John 15:8, *NASB*

Bearing the fruits of the Spirit also has other blessed effects. As we manifest more of such fruitage in our lives, it conveys a blessing to others in the narrow way of sacrifice as we enjoy Christian fellowship with them. They are encouraged and comforted by our spiritual fruit, and we by theirs. In addition, it is a blessing to all those with whom we come in contact each day. For this reason, we earnestly strive to let our “light so shine before men.” —Matt. 5:16

“God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.” (Heb. 6:10, *NASB*) Our fruit-bearing will not go unappreciated or unrewarded, but it will accrue the treasure of which Jesus spoke: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” —Matt. 6:19-21, *NASB*

If we are now sowing the firstfruits of the Spirit in difficult experiences, we shall joyously reap. The psalmist speaks poetically of this. “Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes

to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Ps. 126:5,6, *NASB*) In the resurrection, we shall come again with shouts of joy, and bring our firstfruits to lay them before our Heavenly King.

DIVINE ORDER

As we have noted, the term “firstfruits” implies afterfruits, so the Apostle Paul makes it plain that Jesus and his church are not the only ones raised from the dead. “As all men die by virtue of their descent from Adam,” he writes, “so all such as are in union with Christ will be made to live again.” (I Cor. 15:22, *Williams New Testament*) However, there is a divine order to this. As would naturally be expected, the “firstfruits,” having proven faithful in laying down their lives in service to the Lord during the present Gospel Age, will receive “the first resurrection.” “On such the second death hath no power,” because they will be given the “divine nature.” (Rev. 20:4-6) After the first resurrection is complete, then the remainder of mankind, the afterfruits, will be raised from the dead. (I Cor. 15:23) Thus, their resurrection will be accomplished during the thousand year reign of the Christ class, Head and body members. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—vss. 25,26

In the resurrection, Paul explains, some will be given “celestial,” or heavenly bodies, while others will have “terrestrial,” or human bodies. (vs. 40) It is the firstfruits class that is exalted to heavenly, or

celestial, glory in the resurrection. Of those in this class Paul writes, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."—I Cor. 15:44

The "first man is of the earth." Adam had a natural body, which was perfect until he sinned. "The second man is the Lord from heaven," whom Paul also says "was made a quickening [life-giving] spirit." (vss. 45-47) The hope of those who are desiring to faithfully follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus is to be exalted to heavenly glory and be associated with "the last Adam" as life-givers to all the remainder of mankind. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," writes Paul. (vs. 50) This refers to the firstfruits, who inherit the rulership of the kingdom, having a heavenly reward. All the subjects of the kingdom will be raised "flesh and blood," as human beings. This consummation of God's plan must wait until those of the firstfruits class have all been exalted to glory. Paul writes concerning the glorious conclusion of these things: "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—I Cor. 15:54,55; Isa. 25:8; Hos. 13:14

Those who are raised in Christ's thousand-year kingdom as human beings will be given that time to be "taught by God," and learn of his ways. (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45) The full thought of Paul's words in I Corinthians is that during that period all who do not compose the heavenly "firstfruits" of the resurrection will, nevertheless, have the opportunity to accept Christ and to obey the laws of his kingdom, and thus live forever on a restored, perfect earth.

For this to be so, it will be necessary for mankind to be awakened from the sleep of death. Paul writes that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (I Tim. 2:4) The fulfillment of this will begin with mankind’s awakening from the sleep of death which resulted from Adam’s transgression. Once brought back from death, they will be enlightened and taught all of God’s principles of righteousness. Those who become his during that time, through belief and heart obedience, will be restored to perfection of life and live forever.

VICTORY OVER DEATH

The “victory” over death for both the church and the world is possible only through Christ, and because he gave himself in death as a “ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) This victory is manifested in the resurrection, and it is by the sacrifice of the perfect “man Christ Jesus” that the hope of future life for all who have died is made possible—just as it was by the disobedience of perfect man Adam that death was brought into the world.

How important it is that we continue steadfast in these simple truths of God’s plan, centered in Christ. “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”—Heb. 3:14; I Cor. 15:58

There are not many today who will give heed to this beautiful and simple message. However, this was true in Paul’s day also. It has always been true

and will continue that way until Satan is bound and can “deceive the nations no more.” (Rev. 20:3) Nevertheless, God’s designs are being accomplished. The most important part of this for the child of God is our own preparation to be associated with Jesus in the work of the kingdom by proving worthy to become part of the “firstfruits” class.

IN SUMMARY

The essence of this lesson is as expressed in our theme text, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” Others have been awakened from the sleep of death temporarily, but have died again subsequently, as in the case of Lazarus. (John 11:1-44) Concerning Jesus, however, Paul says, “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” The resurrected Lord himself testified also, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen.”—Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:18

The Scriptures assure us that soon the glorious kingdom of promise is to manifest itself in “power and great glory” for the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Isa. 40:5; Matt. 24:30) With this is the assurance that peace and goodwill shall soon be established throughout the earth, and that sin, selfishness, sickness, and death are to be destroyed. The Bible further promises that all those who have died are to be awakened from the sleep of death, that they also might share in the blessings of the Messianic kingdom. All of these hopes, and more, are assured because Jesus Christ died as man’s Redeemer, and was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God.

Most assuredly, the Bible promises that there is a coming new day of opportunity for all, which God has made certain by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Quoting once again the words of Paul, he states concerning God: “He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31, NASB) Let us rejoice in these wonderful truths contained in the Word of God! ■

Talking with my Father

*I love to talk to my Father
In the quiet hours of the night.
Then the trials of the day seem to vanish away
And hide themselves from my sight.*

*I love to talk to my Father!
He's never too tired to hear.
If the day has seemed long
and things have gone wrong
He seems especially near.*

*I thank Him for all of my blessings,
And yes, for the trials that come too.
What tree would grow strong
if no storms came along?
'Tis the winter brings spring fresh and new.*

*I ask Him for strength to press onward,
To help me my burdens to bear.
And so for the morrow, no troubles I borrow—
Remembering for me He doth care.*

—Poems of the Way

God's Steadfast Love

Key Verse: *“Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”*
—*Psalm 100:3, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 100:1-5

actions. He writes, “Serve the LORD with gladness.” Similarly the Prophet Jeremiah wrote: “Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.” (Jer. 15:16, *NASB*) As with Jeremiah, the word of God should bring us our greatest joy and we should feed upon his words. In addition, our obedience in following the Lord’s instructions and principles, along with any service we might render to him and his people, should be done both voluntarily and with joy.

In verse 3 we are instructed to acknowledge and have complete assurance that our Heavenly Father is the one and only true God. The psalmist writes, “Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves.” (*NASB*) Likewise, Paul told those in

PSALM 100 IS AN ADMONITION to thank and praise our loving Heavenly Father. It begins with the words, from the *NASB* translation, “Shout joyfully to the LORD,” an expression found throughout the Book of Psalms. (Ps. 66:1; 81:1; 95:1,2; 98:4,6) Such joyful praise is desired from “all the earth.” Here the word “earth” is a symbol representing all mankind.—Ps. 22:27

In verse 2 of our lesson the psalmist instructs us to accompany such praises with our

Athens, “God who made the world and all things in it ... is Lord of heaven and earth,” and he “does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.” (Acts 17:22-25, *NASB*) How humble this should make us before our Heavenly Father, realizing that he does not need anything from us, nor are we indispensable in order for him to work out his plans and purposes.

In the reminder of verse 3 the psalmist expresses God’s steadfast love to those who strive to serve him and follow his principles. He writes, “We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (*NASB*) Just as a shepherd watches over, protects, leads, guides and lovingly takes care of his flock, so too does our Heavenly Father likewise do for all those who are striving to follow after him.

Verse 4 instructs us to “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.” Those who continually exhibit thankfulness to the Lord for all his mercies and blessings are led to count not their present lives dear unto themselves, but instead are joyfully willing to lay down their lives in the divine service.—Acts 20:22-24; Phil. 3:7,8

Their hearts are filled with praise, having made a full consecration of themselves. Thus, the heavenly light and food supplied to them from the Word of God enables them to rejoice, even in tribulation. (II Cor. 1:3-6; 7:4) Without strength and enlightenment from God’s Word, such tribulations would discourage them. However, because they have entered into a special relationship with the Heavenly Father and claim the “precious promises” which he has given, they are joyful in their Christian walk. (Rom. 8:17; II Pet. 1:4) When their pilgrimage of the present life is ended, and if faithful unto death, they shall receive a heavenly resurrection and fulness of joy and will enter “into the joy” of the Lord in the full and complete sense.—Matt. 25:21,23; Rev. 2:10 ■

God's Righteous Judgment

Key Verse: "He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity."

—Psalm 9:8, New American Standard Bible

Selected Scripture: Psalm 9:1-14

AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

for which we give thanks is his righteous justice and judgment. The psalmist expresses such thankfulness, stating: "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart," that is, with all our devotion, will and sentiments. —Ps. 9:1, NASB

The reason for such thankfulness is stated in verse 4, "You have maintained my just cause; You have sat on the throne judging righteously." (NASB) Justice and righteous judgment are fundamental elements of God's character. Elsewhere it is stated, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You." (Ps. 89:14, NASB) These attributes of God are emphasized throughout the book of Psalms.—Ps. 96:10; 98:9

Righteous judgment is based upon fixed and pure principles, without partiality, and dispensed with love. God desires that all those seeking him also learn to develop righteousness and upright judgment in their own lives. As we are told in the Book of Proverbs, "To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice."—Prov. 21:3, NASB

Today in society there is a growing lack of righteous behavior and at various times a lack of justice. However, God has promised that this will not always be the case. He has promised the time will soon come when his kingdom on earth will be established, when as our Key Verse states, “He will judge the world in righteousness” and “execute judgment for the peoples with equity.”

The Apostle Paul gives a further proof of when and how such righteous judgment will be established throughout the entire earth, stating that God “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31, *NASB*) Here the word “judge” is translated from the Greek word *krino*, meaning the process of a trial, rather than simply a verdict.

The word “day” in Scripture is frequently used to signify a period of time, rather than a literal twenty-four hours. (Heb. 3:8,9) Peter states how long the world’s judgment “day” will last, stating that “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years.”—II Pet. 3:7,8, *NASB*

The psalmist indicates that God’s judgment day will be a time for rejoicing and joy, because “He will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice ... before the LORD, for He is coming ... to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, And the peoples in His faithfulness.”—Ps. 96:10-13, *NASB*

Jesus will have associate judges with him, those who make a full consecration to do God’s will during the present Gospel Age, and who are proven “faithful unto death.” (Rev. 2:10) Paul confirms this, stating, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (I Cor. 6:2, *NASB*) These associate judges are described by the Apostle John as follows: “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. ... They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4,6, *NASB* ■

Praise for Deliverance

Key Verse: “*Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses.*” —*Psalm 107:6, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 107:1-9

PSALM 107 BEGINS WITH the phrase, “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good.” (NASB) How much we should thank our Heavenly Father, especially because “His lovingkindness is everlasting.” God demonstrated his love for mankind by providing his only begotten Son, “the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all.”—John 3:16,17; I Tim. 2:5,6

As a result of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice all mankind has been “redeemed from the hand of the adversary.” (Ps. 107:2, NASB) However, the restoration of mankind back into harmony with God has not yet occurred, because during the present Gospel Age a heavenly call, or invitation, has gone out for nearly two-thousand years throughout the earth, to all those willing to fully dedicate their life to obey and serve our Heavenly Father.—Rom. 12:1

Those responding to this call have “wandered in the wilderness” of this “present evil world.” They are not satisfied with the present life, but instead feel like “strangers and pilgrims,” desiring to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.” (Ps. 107:4; Gal. 1:4; I Pet. 2:11) They are those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.”—Matt. 5:6

Although many hear about the heavenly call, few have chosen to accept this invitation to make a covenant by sacrifice. (Matt. 22:14) This heavenly invitation has been

answered by one here and one there. They are gathered “from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.” (Ps. 107:3) Still fewer, only a “little flock,” prove to be “faithful” unto death.—Luke 12:32; Rev. 2:10; 17:14

Those accepting the heavenly call desire to live close to our Heavenly Father, to know more about him, and to serve him and his people in whatever ways he may permit. They are not satisfied with present conditions. Instead, their sentiment in the present life is that their “citizenship is in heaven,” and that they “do not have a lasting city” here upon the earth, but “are seeking the city which is to come.”—Phil. 3:20; Heb. 13:12-14, *NASB*

The “lasting city” which they are seeking is the heavenly phase of God’s kingdom, the “new Jerusalem,” which is promised to “Him that overcometh.” (Rev. 3:12) This “holy city, new Jerusalem” is described as “coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” who is Christ Jesus. (Rev. 21:2,9; II Cor. 11:2) The new Jerusalem will be the entire Christ class in glory, Jesus the “head” together with his “body” members. (Eph. 5:23,24) This heavenly phase of the kingdom will not be visible to the rest of mankind, who will be restored to perfect human life in the earthly phase of the kingdom, based on their obedience to the divine laws then in operation.

At the present time, those who accept the heavenly call are led by the Lord in a “straight way,” a “narrow” way, which is indicated by the instructions and precepts given in the word of God. (Ps. 107:7, *NASB*; Matt. 7:14) They not only delight to search the word of God to find the directions of this “straight way,” but after finding these they “eat them”—that is, they strive to personally apply God’s principles and standards. (Jer. 15:16; James 1:22) The Lord directs in the right way, the best way, therefore we should be careful to note his leadings and be quick in following them. ■

Dwelling in the House of the Lord

Key Verse: “*How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You.*”

—*Psalm 84:4, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 84:1-12

order to find a house or nest, and compares this to those seeking after our Heavenly Father.—vs. 3

Our Key Verse begins with the phrase, “How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!” Here the word “dwell” means to remain, and is used elsewhere in the Psalms to describe abiding continually in God’s presence.—Ps. 23:6; 27:4

The word “house,” in the original Hebrew, denotes a fixed or established structure, as opposed to a temporary dwelling place such as a tent. When used in a context associated with God, this Hebrew word also signifies a place of worship, or sanctuary. We read: “You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.” (Exod. 23:19, *NASB*) Here the expression “first fruits” is used to symbolically represent those who have accepted the heavenly call during

THROUGHOUT THE PSALMS

we are encouraged to increase our devotion to and love for God. We read, “My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.” (Ps. 84:2, *NASB*) The psalmist then points out examples from nature, such as birds and swallows who search in

the present Gospel Age, and who are striving to follow in the footsteps of Christ.—Lev. 23:15-20; Rom. 8:23; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4

However, there are conditions and requirements which will enable one to dwell in the house of the Lord. One such requirement is to obey, or “keep,” the words of Jesus. He said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” (John 14:23) Through the psalmist, God identifies another requirement, stating, “He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.” —Ps. 101:7

We will dwell continually in the house of the Lord, “if we hold on to our courage and the hope in which we rejoice.” (Heb. 3:6, *International Standard Version*) Those who persevere with courage and faith overcome the allurements and temptations of the world. They do this by dying daily to its spirit, hopes and ambitions, and by instead living more and more unto God. Thus, they shall indeed dwell in the house of the Lord—in his holy, spiritual temple, forever. Meanwhile, during the present time they dwell in the holy place of consecration and adoption as children of God.—Rom. 8:12-18

Those who become members, “living stones,” in God’s spiritual house, the heavenly temple now under construction, will indeed dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (I Pet. 2:5, *NASB*) If proven faithful unto death, they will be a “pillar” in God’s temple, and ministers of his grace and truth to mankind.—Rev. 3:12

Our Key Verse will be true also in the kingdom which will soon come on earth, when all mankind will be invited to come to God in worship. They will be given the opportunity to approach the spiritual temple, the Christ class, and through them to draw near to the Heavenly Father. At that time, all who shall hear the true message of God’s Word and obey it will be glad indeed.—Rev. 21:1-5 ■

Praise Ye the Lord

Key Verse: “*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!*”
—*Psalms 150:6, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scriptures:
Psalms 149:1-5; 150:1-6

excellent.”—Ps. 119:75; 135:3; 148:13

The concluding chapter in the book of Psalms summarizes the importance of continually praising our Heavenly Father. We are told to praise God with “the sound of the trumpet,” with “psaltery and harp,” with “timbrel and dance,” with “stringed instruments and organs,” and with “cymbals.” (Ps. 50:3-5) However, many of us may have little or no ability to literally sing or play any of the musical instruments mentioned. Does this mean that we cannot praise God? Surely not!

We suggest that each musical talent listed as to be used for praising God in this Psalm may have a symbolic, non-literal application, and thus contains valuable lessons for God’s people. Verse 3 begins by telling us to praise God with the sound of the trumpet. Here the word trumpet in the original Hebrew language has the meaning of “giving a clear sound.” Perhaps this includes

THE IMPORTANCE OF praising our Heavenly Father is found throughout the book of Psalms. We are instructed to praise God with all our “heart,” to praise him for “his merciful kindness,” and for “the truth of the LORD.” (Ps. 111:1; 117:1,2) We are also told to praise God because his “judgments are right,” because he is “good,” and because “his name alone is

the thought of being able to explain or share in simple, easy to understand words, God's wonderful plan to others. Such an image as this is conveyed in Isaiah 58:1, where it states, "Lift up thy voice like a trumpet."

In verse 3 of our lesson we are told to praise God with psaltery. Here the word psaltery has the meaning of "a skin bag for liquids," or "vase," and has been translated elsewhere in the Bible as the word "pitchers." Each of us, symbolically speaking, is a "psaltery" or "pitcher" in the sense that our present life, including how we conduct ourselves throughout each day, is a vessel of the Lord. Such an image is given in these words: "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!"—Lam. 4:2

We are also told in verse 3 to praise God with the harp. Music played on a harp is very peaceful and pleasing to the ear. Praising God with the harp might well represent the development of "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," which shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.—Phil. 4:7

In verse 4 we are told to praise God with the timbrel and dance, and with stringed instruments, and organs. Perhaps these instruments portray our having joy and gladness in the Lord.—I Sam. 18:6; Ps. 30:11,12; Jer. 31:13

The Prophet Isaiah warns us concerning praise: "The harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge." (Isa. 5:12,13) Our praises to the Heavenly Father are not merely to be in words, but in all our actions, as we apply the word of God in our daily life. Thus, another way in which we can demonstrate our praise to God is to "keep His statutes and observe His laws."—Ps. 105:45, *NASB* ■

Opening the Windows of Heaven

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”
—*Malachi 3:10*

THE SERVANTS OF GOD

should be the most blessed of all people. If they are not, it may be that they are living below their privileges. When God enters into a covenant relationship with his people, never does he fail to fulfill his part of the agreement. This was true with the natural house of Israel, and it is true of those now who have entered into a covenant with him by sacrifice. (Ps. 50:5) Natural Israel could have

been rich in the blessings of the Lord. However, because of unfaithfulness, the nation was eventually removed from God's favor, and the people were scattered.—Matt. 23:37,38; Luke 21:20-24

In our text the Lord calls attention to the tithing system which he gave to Israel, and by which the religious functions of the nation were maintained. The tithe was one-tenth of an individual's income, and this was to be put into the treasury of the Lord. However, in paying their tithes, Israel was unfaithful, and, as a result, the people became poor in all those natural bounties which could have been theirs had they been obedient. (Mal. 3:7,8) It was in answer to their complaint that Jehovah called upon the nation to change their ways. He directed them to bring their tithes "into the storehouse" and thus "prove" him, and discover that their lack of blessings had been their own fault, and not his. As our verse states, God was ready to "open the windows of heaven" and pour out blessings so rich and abundant that they would be unable to contain them.

The same is true of spiritual Israel. We are under a different covenant than were the ancient Israelites. Theirs was the Law Covenant, under which the Lord promised material blessings to those who were faithful to it. (Deut. 28:1-4) Under that arrangement it was reasonable that a tenth of their annual increase should be devoted to the Lord, and there was no excuse for not adhering to this requirement.

The covenant of this age is one of sacrifice, and under its arrangements no promise is made of material blessings. Ours is a spiritual, or heavenly calling. We are urged to set our "affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col. 3:2) The sacrificial arrangements of our covenant with God do not call for rendering to him a mere tenth of what we possess, but "all" our time, our strength, our talents, are dedicated to him.—Rom. 12:1, *Weymouth New Testament*

To a large extent the nation of Israel walked by sight. To the degree that they were faithful to the Lord, their rewards were forthcoming, and were of a tangible sort which could be seen and appreciated. Ours, on the other hand, is a life of faith, and our appreciation of the spiritual blessings which the Heavenly Father is ever ready to shower upon us depends upon our understanding of what he has promised, and our ability to properly evaluate spiritual blessings in comparison to the material sacrifices which we have the privilege of making.

Throughout the centuries, the fallen human nature has tended mostly towards shortsighted self-interest. If by faith we do not rise above it, such thinking will still blind us to the real and eternal issues of life. We may feel a degree of satisfaction, perhaps even relief, that we are not living under the covenant that required a tenth. We know, however, that under our covenant of sacrifice the Lord expects us to give all. Because it is wholly a freewill offering, there is a danger that we may not render unto God even as much as the tenth which was required of Israel.

THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE

As we have noted, the blessings of the Lord during this age are not material, but spiritual. Are we receiving from him the abundant and overflowing portion which he has promised? There are, of course, two viewpoints of the Christian life. It is a narrow way in which we are walking, and oftentimes it is difficult. There are many trials to endure—trials of our faith—but even these should be considered a precious asset, because they are helping to prepare

us for the eternal joys which await us beyond the veil.—I Pet. 1:7; II Cor. 4:17

We are also called upon to suffer with Christ. Suffering is never pleasant according to the flesh, but we can look upon our experiences of this kind as blessings from God. It is through the privilege he has given us, as Paul states, to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ,” that we will have the privilege of living and reigning with him.—Col. 1:24; II Tim. 2:11,12

However, we are not to think of the Christian life merely from the standpoint of its difficulties or hardships. If we do we might become long-faced, sorrowful Christians. The Lord wants us to rejoice, not in the form of hilarity, but to have an abiding peace and confidence in him. By faith we are able to rejoice despite the trials of the narrow way. (Rom. 5:3-5) Indeed, a part of our present inheritance is the peace and joy which Jesus bequeathed to us when he said, “My peace I give unto you.”—John 14:27

The Master’s peace and joy were deeply rooted in his confidence in the Heavenly Father. He had full assurance that not one of all the precious promises of God would go unfulfilled. Not once did the Master doubt the victorious outcome of the divine plan and purpose, both for himself and for all mankind.

This peace of the Christian is ours in a full, rich measure if we can but lay hold of the promises of God as Jesus did. He explained that our peace is “not as the world giveth,” which at best is based upon human promises and human ability to make good these promises. Similarly, it is not a peace which, perhaps, is based upon a bank account, or

upon the hope of continuing in good health, or upon the security of an expensive home.

How little the world knows about true peace, which the Scriptures say surpasses all human understanding. (Phil. 4:7) The peace of God abides in the Christian's heart despite the turmoil and chaos with which he may be surrounded, and despite the fading of earthly hopes and joys! Most in the world work and strive nearly a lifetime with the hope of finding security and a consequent peace of mind and heart, yet this goal is often never attained. Even with those who are measurably successful, their peace is short-lived and frequently disturbed by doubts and fears of various sorts.

How rich indeed are we who have entered into a covenant of sacrifice with the Lord! It is essential, however, to fulfill our covenant if we would continue to enjoy the showers of heavenly blessings which make us so rich. Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Then he adds, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."—John 15:10,11

As indicated in the foregoing passage, the peace and joy which can and should be ours depend upon keeping our covenant, and by obeying the commandment which Jesus gave. What is that commandment? Jesus stated it clearly, saying, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (vs. 12) There are many details and ramifications in the carrying out of this commandment, but in reality it comprises all that the Lord expects of his consecrated people.

Our covenant of sacrifice with God includes the privilege of loving our brethren as Jesus loved us. He loved us so fully that he “laid down his life for us,” and we are to “lay down our lives for the brethren.” (I John 3:14-16) The work of the Lord during the Gospel Age is the calling and preparation of Christ’s footstep followers to live and reign with him. (Rev. 20:4) In Revelation 19:7 this is spoken of as his “wife” making herself ready. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the great objective was the selection and making ready of the “bride” class. —Rev. 21:2,9,10

The work of preparation to be part of the “bride” of Christ has called for sacrifice and service on the part of every true Christian, and it is thus that their love for one another has been manifested. Our love for the brethren does not end with the efforts we put forth to reach them with the Gospel message. When they hear the message and accept it, and together with us enter into a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice, they still need our love. This is a love that will be patient with their weaknesses and do everything possible to help them along in the narrow way. It is a love, too, when necessary, that will guard one another against the fiery darts of the great enemy, Satan. In short, to have a proper love for our brethren—the kind of love which Jesus manifested—means that we will sense our responsibility toward them, both in sharing the Gospel message by which they are reached and made our brethren, and also in assisting them thereafter.

In most united efforts the human tendency is to permit the few to shoulder the responsibility, while

the majority sit on the sidelines giving their approval, but doing little more than this. This is not the Lord's arrangement for his people. Each one who has entered into a covenant by sacrifice with the Heavenly Father is held responsible for faithfulness to that covenant. We cannot be victorious nor enjoy the riches of God's blessings simply because we are members of a congregation of Christians. We must be individually faithful!

COOPERATION IN THE MINISTRY

The Lord is pleased to have us cooperate in manifesting our self-sacrificing love for the brethren. An example of this is in the arrangement he has made for his people to meet together as ecclesias, or local congregations. In most Christian circles this arrangement has been distorted considerably, so that the clergy are considered the principal ones to serve, while others attend the church services merely to be served. This is a wrong viewpoint.

In the true church, every consecrated follower of the Master is to engage in service. Each individual Christian is instructed to lay down his life for the brethren. Some, indeed, may be chosen to teach, or to exhort publicly, but this does not relieve the others of the responsibility of being servants. How rich are the blessings of the Lord for those who maintain and practice this viewpoint! Those who associate with God's people with the thought of serving, as well as of being served, are the ones who receive the richest blessings.

A great deal is said in the New Testament about a general cooperation among the brethren. The individual congregations which made up the Early

Church were kept more or less in contact with one another through the ministry of the apostles and others. However, the spreading of the Gospel and the building up of the brethren was restricted by the extent to which the servants of the church could travel from place to place, and to the giving of personal testimonies concerning God's plan as it is centered in Christ Jesus.

Today we live in a much different world. The Gospel can still be spread by the personal testimonies and witness efforts of the brethren, but its proclamation is not limited to these individual efforts. Through the printed page, radio, television, the Internet, and many forms of electronic media, the Gospel message can go forth worldwide. Even this, though, is possible only through the general cooperation of the consecrated. The vast increase in communication technology, which has made this wider proclamation of the Gospel possible, is undoubtedly by divine providence. Thus, we cannot but believe that the Heavenly Father wants these facilities used to make known the glad tidings of the kingdom. Do we feel our privileges and responsibilities as we should in connection with this larger work of the church?

Notwithstanding the ability to share in promulgating a wider dissemination of the Truth, and of giving the comforting message of God's coming kingdom of peace, the principal objective of our sacrifice is still the service of the brethren. It is not God's time to convert the world, but it is his time to call, through the message of truth, those whom he is inviting to be joint-heirs with Christ. This should be our main purpose in making known the glad

tidings. As we do so, however, a witness is also given to the world. In this, too, we greatly rejoice, remembering Jesus' commission that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations."—Matt. 24:14

PAYING OUR TITHES

Every footstep follower of the Master knows that his life is consecrated to God and to his service. We also know that he requires not merely a tenth of what we have, but all that we have and are. Yet, at times there may be an unintentional indefiniteness about our consecration which tends to blur its objective. We know that we are to serve the Lord, and are willing to make any sacrifice whatever to do so, but how is it to be done? What are some of the practical ways in which we can pay our "tithes" to the Heavenly Father and thus rejoice in the blessings poured out upon us from the windows of heaven?

First, and this is true in every Christian's life, is our responsibility toward our families and any others dependent upon us. God wants that responsibility discharged faithfully, as unto him. Many have testified of the rich blessings which have been theirs as a result of endeavoring to provide for their own with an eye single to the glory of God.—I Tim. 5:8; I Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17

However, there is most always something left of time or means in the life of the Christian after their responsibilities toward their own are properly and faithfully discharged. Whether it be great or small, what can we do with this surplus of time, energy or means which we have covenanted to devote to the service of the Lord? The ultimate answer to this

question must, of necessity, be found by each individual child of God. None of us would presume to tell another brother or sister what they must do in the service of the Lord. All we can do is to point out what others have done, and the possibilities there may be of rendering practical service.

We may feel at times that there is so little we can do that we end up doing nothing. This is not the proper course. Even if we could put all our time directly into the Lord's service, and even if we were especially talented along some line which could be used in the spreading of the Gospel, or if we had millions of dollars to contribute to these efforts, we would still be unprofitable servants. Let us ever remember that God is not interested in how much we can do for him, but only that we do all we can.

Those who have only a few minutes each day which they can spend in the Lord's service, or a few pennies which they can devote to him, are just as pleasing in his sight as those who can do and give more. Recalling Jesus' lesson of the widow's mite, she had very little, but she gave all, which was more valuable in the Lord's sight than the large sums given by those who had great abundance. (Mark 12:41-44) The lesson, then, is that regardless of what we each have in the way of time, talent, and means, if we devote everything we can to his service, we are demonstrating the genuineness of our consecration. We thus will become partakers of the showers of blessings which continually flow from the windows of heaven to those who faithfully "bring all the tithes into the storehouse."

If we are living where we have the privilege of association with others of the Lord's consecrated

people, then we will want to be on the alert to render whatever direct service we can for their encouragement and blessing. We will want to cooperate zealously in whatever activities the ecclesia may be sponsoring. We will want to be faithful in assembling together with our brethren, and be as helpful as possible by participation in studies and testimony meetings.

These are all privileges of service which, when faithfully used, will increase our own rejoicing in the Lord. There is no truer saying than that which Paul accredits to Jesus, namely, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) It is easy to overlook this. We are prone to think of our relationship to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren merely from the standpoint of the advantages accruing to us! However, this is the sure way to spiritual poverty. When we get the viewpoint implied in our covenant of sacrifice and begin to search for ways and means of giving and serving for the blessing of others, then we will have real joy in the Lord, and we will find our lives as Christians flowing on in endless song.

GOD'S PROMISES

God's promises to us as individuals are conditional. He has made every necessary provision for our blessing, but it is necessary for us to accept of his grace by complying with the conditions. (Eph. 2:4-8) It is not a matter of earning divine favor. If it were, then it would not be grace at all. That which we can do in response to the grace of our Heavenly Father is merely a matter of showing our appreciation of what he has done for us, and what he will

continue to do, if we give all diligence in the carrying out of our covenant of sacrifice.

Paul wrote, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Heb. 4:1) How can we come short of a promise? The thought is that we may come short of the conditions attached to the promises. In this text, Paul is speaking particularly of the rest of faith which is promised every footstep follower of the Master. Are we enjoying that rest as we should? If not, it would be well to examine ourselves to discover wherein we are failing to live up to our covenant, and to bring all our tithes into the storehouse.

Through the Scriptures, we learn that God has made every provision for our blessing. Our lives as New Creatures should be full and rich, overflowing with peace and joy in the Lord.

Through Christ’s redemptive work we have been given a robe of righteousness.—Isa. 61:10

The Holy Spirit guides and comforts us.—John 14:16-18; 16:13

The angels have been appointed our ministering spirits, and of these Jesus said that they always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven.—Heb. 1:13,14; Matt. 18:10

God has given us his Word, and in it we find his will for us and his plan for the world.—James 1:18

He has made provision for our fellowship with one another.—Heb. 10:25; I John 1:7

We have been served with “meat in due season,” so that we know the meaning of the chaotic events in the world by which we are surrounded.—Matt. 24:45

He has given us the assurance that no evil shall befall us, that no enemy, no matter how cunning or formidable, can take us from under his loving care.—Ps. 91:9,10

He has promised to be our refuge and fortress, a bulwark against all the opposing forces which endeavor to disrupt his plan and destroy his seed of promise.—Ps. 91:1-4; Gal. 3:29

He has said that he will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, but will provide everything that is good for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Ps. 84:11

He has assured us that all things shall work together for our good. Every experience, whether of joy or sorrow, will be permitted to enrich our lives and increase our joy in the Lord.—Rom. 8:28

Surely we cannot ask for more! All of these loving provisions are for us, to make us rich in the peace and joy of the Lord. Are we, through faithfulness to our covenant, keeping the windows of heaven open, that the life-giving waters of divine grace, mercy and strength may daily keep us refreshed and strong?

If we would enjoy God's grace we must daily go to him in prayer. If we would know his will we must study his Word and watch for his leading in our life. If we would have peace and rest of heart we must believe his promises and comply with the conditions attached to them. At every turn of the Christian way there is something for the follower of the Master to do. Taken together, it means the laying down of our lives in divine service, rejoicing in the shed blood of Jesus which makes our sacrifice acceptable, and enjoying the assurance of God

that he will guide and help us, that his strength will be made perfect in our weakness.

Through the grace of God in Christ Jesus we have entered into a spiritual land of plenty. Let us continue to abide therein by rendering to the Lord all that we have covenanted to do. Thus will the windows of heaven remain open throughout all the days of our earthly pilgrimage, and an abundant entrance into the kingdom will be assured when we have reached the end of the way.—II Pet. 1:10,11 ■

*“He [God] saved us and called us to be his own people,
not because of what we have done,
but because of his own purpose and grace. He gave us
this grace by means of Christ Jesus
before the beginning of time, but now it has been
revealed to us through the coming
of our Savior, Christ Jesus.”*
—II Timothy 1:9,10, Good News Bible

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

OCTOBER 7—“Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.”—Matthew 7:26 (Z. ’04-46 Hymn 178)

OCTOBER 14—“To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.”—Proverbs 21:3 (Z. ’04-56,57 Hymn 177)

OCTOBER 21—“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”—Luke 11:2 (Z. ’04-118 Hymn 365)

OCTOBER 28—“The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because he hath anointed me,... to comfort all that mourn, ...to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning.”—Isaiah 61:1,2 (Z. ’04-295 Hymn 116)

Abiding in Jesus' Word

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

***—John 8:31,32,
English Standard
Version***

AT THE TIME OF HIS earthly ministry, Jesus came exclusively to the Jewish nation, which was in covenant relationship with God. The privilege of becoming the Lord's disciples was offered first to this nation, and their blessing would be in propor-

tion as they were faithful to the light that would come to them. Before these blessings could flow, however, it was necessary that Jesus should "redeem them that were under the law," make reconciliation for iniquity, and open "a new and living way." (Gal. 4:4,5; Tit. 2:13,14; Heb. 10:19,20) This he had come to do, but he had not done it as yet. Whoever would come to understand the divine purposes and arrangements, and act in harmony with them, should be made free, and be liberated from the condemnation resting upon them as Jews resulting from the weaknesses of their flesh, and be brought into full accord with God.—Rom. 8:2-4

This great privilege also meant something more than all this. It signified the prospect of being “joint-heirs” with their Messiah. (Rom. 8:16,17) However, all these things were mostly a hidden mystery known up to that time only by Jesus himself, because he had been begotten of the Holy Spirit at the time of his baptism. (Col. 1:26,27) Thus, there were many things Jesus spoke that were hard for his hearers to understand. He often spoke in parables, and in obscure sayings, for the very purpose of making the way of life soon to be opened up a “narrow” way. (Matt. 7:14) We read in the Scriptures that some said of the Master’s words, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”—John 6:60, *New King James Version*

The particularly “hard saying” referred to was that his “flesh is meat indeed,” and his “blood is drink indeed,” and that by eating and drinking of these they might gain eternal life. (vss. 54,55) We read that after this many forsook him and abandoned the thought of being his disciples, rather than following on patiently until a fuller revelation would come.—vs. 66

Jesus was anticipating this condition of things when he spoke these words to them. It was as though he was saying: You have declared that “No one ever spoke like this man.” (John 7:46, *ESV*) Already you have heard words very different from the words of the scribes and Pharisees. Now continue; hold on for a little while. If you will do this, you will grasp the situation in due time. Exercise faith—exercise patience. You have begun to have interest in these things, and as you fully become my disciples you will be granted greater knowledge. This “truth will

set you free” from bondage to the Law of ordinances, ceremonies and traditions under which you presently struggle. Freedom from this will give you all the blessings and privileges that come to the children of God. Greatly blessed were the few who took heed to the Master’s counsel.

BLESSINGS BEGUN AT PENTECOST

Nicodemus was evidently one of those who was sympathetically drawn to the teachings of Jesus. Understandably, however, he was inclined to stumble over spiritual things. For example, he could not see how one could be “born again.” (John 3:1-9) Later, the Gospel writer, John, explains why such statements could not yet be fully understood: “The Holy Spirit was not yet given,” and this would not occur until Jesus was glorified.—John 7:39

Nevertheless, some saw enough in Jesus to attract them to him. These said in their heart: Surely his words are true, and his criticisms of our nation are true. We do not see how he is going to fulfill these prophecies, but he desires that we hold on to our faith, and he promises that we will understand later. Indeed, some did hold on, “above five hundred brethren,” who were witnesses of his resurrection. (I Cor. 15:6) As Jesus had promised, these and others who held to his words were given the privilege of becoming disciples indeed.

When Pentecost came, the Heavenly Father received all who had abided in Jesus’ word, and they were begotten of the Holy Spirit into God’s family. Their minds were illuminated, and they began to understand spiritual things. However, all

the light of the “truth” message did not come at once, but was revealed progressively as the days and years went by. These were indeed Christ’s true disciples, being such followers of Jesus as the Father was pleased to recognize. They were not only made free from their bondage under the Jewish Law arrangement, but were also made free from the “law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:2) They received a new will, a new mind, and the Holy Spirit revealed “the deep things of God” unto them. —I Cor. 2:10

In his prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) By the word “truth” Jesus was here referring to the Father’s revelation of his plan through the Holy Spirit. The sanctifying influence would come through that knowledge, as it was received into an honest heart. This sanctification, or the process of making holy, had its full beginning with the Pentecostal blessing, and still continues to operate in Christ’s footstep followers. This work progresses as long as the individual allows the Truth to have its designed influence in their life.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him.” (John 14:6,7) Jesus, by his words and deeds, taught his disciples how to “know” his Father, as being a God of love. Jesus is the only one through whom we can truly come to know the Father and become his sons. Thus, abiding in the Lord’s word will bring us the grand consummation of our hopes.

OUR SUFFICIENCY

We perceive, then, that Christ is the sufficiency which God has provided for us in all respects. The Apostle Paul said that it is Christ Jesus who “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (I Cor. 1:30) We first received, through learning of Jesus’ sacrificial work on our behalf, necessary wisdom, instruction and guidance, by which we could, through his merit, come to the Father. Jehovah set forth a glorious plan “before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 1:18-20) His plan was suggested in Eden, just after the fall of our first parents. (Gen. 3:14,15) In due time he gave a further intimation of his eternal purpose through Abraham, and still later through Moses and the prophets. (Gen. 22:18; Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22-24) Nevertheless, how the world was to benefit from it was mostly hidden from human understanding.

Not until Jesus came was the way of life opened up and made manifest. Paul states that Christ “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (II Tim. 1:10) Our Lord began to speak the message of the Gospel, but his words were often veiled in parabolic language. It was not until his followers were begotten of the Holy Spirit that they were able to enter into “the deep things of God.” Today, nearly two-thousand years later, Jesus’ wisdom continues to guide and direct his disciples all along their journey in the narrow way.

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SANCTIFICATION

In addition to his being our source of wisdom, Paul states that Jesus becomes our “righteousness,” or justification. By the imputation of his own

righteousness through the merit of his sacrifice, our Adamic sins are covered. This imputation brings us to a condition of justification, reckoned so by God according to the arrangement which he has been pleased to authorize.—Rom. 5:1,2,8-11

During the present Gospel Age, our Lord does not become the righteousness of everybody, but to those alone who come to the point of full dedication to the Father's will. There is a good reason for this, for only those who offer themselves to become fully his disciples—only the Spirit-begotten—would be profited by a justification by faith. In the next age, the remainder of mankind will be given the opportunity to become justified by works, and by heart obedience to the righteous laws in effect throughout the earth at that time.—Isa. 26:9; Jer. 31:31-34

The step of dedication, or consecration, on the part of those who become Jesus' disciples is the first step in the process that Paul calls "sanctification." However, the sanctification which comes to us through Jesus goes much further. Jehovah instructed the Israelites, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy," and I will "sanctify you." (Lev. 20:7,8) That is, set yourselves apart to holiness, and I will supervise that work by giving you the needed experiences in order for its more complete accomplishment. (I Thess. 4:3,4; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2) Similarly, to all of us who come to the Father through his beloved Son, Jesus not only becomes our righteousness, but through him and the experiences we have by following in his footsteps, we come to complete sanctification. This is only possible through Jesus. It is his grace and advocacy alone that enable us to attain complete and final sanctification.—Eph. 2:4-7; I John 2:1

God, likewise, sanctifies us by begetting us with his Holy Spirit, making us prospective members of the “royal priesthood,” and of the “body of Christ,” the Anointed One. (I Pet. 2:9; I Cor. 12:12-27) This “holy Spirit of promise” is called an “earnest,” or pledge, of our inheritance, which will be experienced to the full when we are changed from the human to the spirit nature in the “first resurrection.” (Eph. 1:13,14; Rev. 20:6) Let us remember, however, that this pledge of our inheritance is given to us for the purpose of our growth in the process of sanctification already begun in us until its completion—that is, even “unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

JESUS OUR DELIVERANCE

Lastly, Paul says that Christ has been made our “redemption.” The thought here presented relates not only to the redemptive merit of Jesus’ sacrifice, but also to full deliverance into the kingdom of God. Those who make satisfactory progress and “abide” in Jesus’ word and example of wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, will experience full deliverance in the first resurrection. Christ thus becomes our deliverance. We shall then “be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

In all these things Christ is the center, and through him alone can we obtain these promised blessings. While the Father is the source of all these, they are given by, or through, his Son, who is the Father’s representative. (I Cor. 8:6) Therefore, we can say with Paul, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the

foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”—Eph. 1:3,4

EARS TURNED FROM THE TRUTH

The Lord’s preaching always produced two opposite effects upon the multitudes that heard him. He attracted one class and repelled the other. Those who were full of pride and conceit, and who preferred darkness to light because they realized that if they admitted the light of Truth they must of necessity conform their characters to it—all such were repelled by the teachings of Christ.

On some occasions multitudes received his testimony, but later deserted him, walking no more with him as he continued to preach the lessons of divine Truth. (Luke 4:14-29) At other times the multitudes hung upon his teachings “and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” (vs. 22) Yet, in the end, most forsook him, with only the merest handful remaining. Paul later wrote that many “shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”—II Tim. 4:4

What consternation would follow in the various churches of today, if the professed ministers of the Gospel should follow the Master’s example in similarly declaring the whole counsel of God! How quickly they would become unpopular among their congregations. Many today go to church to be entertained with pleasing sermons from eloquent speakers who presumably know the tastes and ideas of the congregation and will preach to please them. They are quite willing to pay their money for what they want to hear, but most are not interested in hearing the word of Truth.

DISCIPLES INDEED

Jesus' statement in our opening text, "You are truly my disciples," implies a distinction between real discipleship and that which is in name only. Since we desire to continue to be Jesus' true disciples, let us again mark well the expressed condition, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." Merely nominal discipleship is not sufficient for us to be counted acceptable to the Lord.

It is a blessed thing to take the first step in the Christian life—that of acceptance of Christ as our Redeemer and yielding ourselves fully to the Father through him. However, the reward of this step depends upon our abiding continually in his word, in the attitude of true disciples. The tendency of human pride is to wander away from the simplicity of divine Truth and to seek out new theories and philosophies of our own, or those of others. Paul warns us, however, against being "corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."—II Cor. 11:3

The reward of continued discipleship is, as Jesus says in our text, "You will know the truth." It is not, you shall be "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (II Tim. 3:7) Failure to abide in the word of the Lord can easily lead to delving into various human philosophies and theories which, either completely or in large part, are not in harmony with the Scriptures. To those who seek for Truth along such lines of human reasoning, it is highly unlikely that they shall find it.

Truth is found only in the divinely appointed way—through the inspired words of the Bible. To continue in the doctrine set forth in the writings of the prophets and the apostles, to study and meditate

upon them, to trust implicitly in them, and to faithfully conform our characters to them, is what is implied in “abide in my word.” This is entirely compatible with the use of the many helps which the Lord raises up from among our brethren, as enumerated by the Apostle Paul. (Eph. 4:11-15) God always has raised up, and continues to do so, such helps for the edification of the body of Christ. However, it is the duty of every member carefully to prove their teaching by the infallible Word, as did the brethren in Berea, and thus “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”—Acts 17:10,11; I Thess. 5:21

If we thus continue to abide in the word of the Lord as earnest and sincere disciples, we shall indeed “know the truth,” and be established in it, firmly rooted and grounded. We shall be strong in the faith, and “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” We will be prepared to “war a good warfare,” to witness “a good confession,” and to firmly “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” even unto the end of our earthly walk. One of our chief battles in this regard will be that of subduing, conquering, and having proper rule over self, “casting down imaginations ... and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—I Pet. 3:15; I Tim. 1:18; 6:13; II Tim. 2:3; II Cor. 10:3-5

We do not come into the knowledge of the Truth at a single bound, but gradually, step-by-step. Each step is one of sure and certain progress leading to a higher vantage ground for further attainments both in knowledge and in established character. The Truth thus acquired, step-by-step, becomes a sanctifying

power, bringing forth in our lives its blessed fruits of righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, love, meekness, faith, patience, and every virtue and every grace, which time and cultivation ripen to a glorious maturity.—Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-8

Not only shall the true disciple thus know the Truth and be sanctified by it, but as the Lord also said in our opening text, “The truth will set you free.” Those who have received the word of Truth know by blessed experience something of its liberating power. As soon as any measure of it is received into a good and honest heart, it begins to strike off the fetters of sin, ignorance, superstition and fear. Its beams penetrate the darkest recesses of our hearts and minds and invigorate our entire being.

GOD’S WORDS GIVE LIGHT

The psalmist wrote concerning Jehovah, “Thy words giveth light.” (Ps. 119:130) Sin cannot endure the light of Truth; ignorance and superstition vanish before it. What a blessed realization it is to be thus liberated! Much of mankind, however, is still under the blinding influence of error. Under its delusions they have been “taught by the precept of men” to fear God as a vengeful tyrant, consigning the vast majority of his creatures to an eternity of torment. (Isa. 29:13) Thank God, we have received the Truth and been awakened from that horrible nightmare, and the bondage of Satan over us is broken. The light has scattered our mists of darkness.

We are made free, too, from the fear that we now see upon the whole world as the great political, social, economic and religious systems are being shaken to the core. Thinking people are in dread of

the possible outcome of anarchy and social upheaval such as has never been seen before. Jesus foretold that near the end of the present Gospel Age there would be “upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity,” and “men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” (Luke 21:25,26) Yet, in the midst of all this, and with the fullest assurance of the infallible Word of God as to the trouble through which the world is currently passing, the true disciples of Christ who abide in his Word are not afraid, but rejoice. Jesus tells us, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is approaching.”—vs. 28, *International Standard Version*

Those who abide in Jesus’ Word know that God’s object in permitting this mighty storm is to clear the degrading atmosphere of the world, and that after the present storm shall come, by divine providence, an abiding peace. Instructed in the Truth, these realize the necessities of the situation, and have confidence in God’s Word, which declares that the “wrath of man shall praise” him, and “the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Thus will “all things work together for good,” according to God’s eternal purpose.—Ps. 76:10; Rom 8:28

Blessed promise! “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Having received this wondrous favor from the Lord, shall we not continue in it, bringing forth its blessed fruitage in our lives? Shall we not be faithful to it under all circumstances, defending it against every assault, and bearing its reproach? Let us prove our appreciation of the

glorious light of Truth by our loyalty and faithfulness, working out our salvation “with a proper sense of awe and responsibility,” in full cooperation with our Heavenly Father, who also is working in us that we might have both “the will and the power to achieve his purpose.”—Phil. 2:12,13, *J. B. Phillips New Testament* ■

Jesus Calls Us

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow Me."*

*Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love Me more."*

*In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love Me more than these."*

*Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,
Savior, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thy obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all."*

—*Hymns of Dawn*

*"If any man serve me,
let him follow me; and where I am,
there shall also my servant be:
if any man serve me,
him will my Father honour."
—John 12:26*

John's Gospel

—A Unique Perspective—

“I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God’s Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus.”

***—Revelation 1:9,
New Living
Translation***

OF THE FOUR GOSPEL

accounts in the New Testament, the Apostle John’s record is quite unique when compared to those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John’s distinctive account of Jesus’ life and ministry, and how it should relate to the followers of the Master throughout the Christian era, comes into focus as we examine certain things about his writings. His style and approach to Jesus’ life was different, but most importantly he had a much different perspective, which,

as we will note, had likely evolved over a long period of time.

Matthew and Mark wrote in a synoptic style. That is, they provided a general summary, or synopsis,

of Jesus' life and ministry. Their words seemed to be especially directed towards Jewish and Gentile audiences who were closely associated with Jerusalem. Luke likewise wrote in a synoptic style, though sometimes less precise than Matthew or Mark. Luke's audience was primarily a Greek one, but most likely covered a wide expanse of readership, particularly because of his extensive travels with the Apostle Paul.

In John's Gospel, however, we do not see a synoptic style. Rather, John principally focuses on a variety of specific experiences in Jesus' life, and goes into great detail about them. Often, these details, or the entire event, were not recorded by any of the other three Gospel writers. Thus, they are unique to John's Gospel. His different style of writing, and method of recording Jesus' experiences, was not due to any conflict between what he had witnessed compared to the other Gospel writers. After all, he was there with Jesus from the beginning, as was Matthew. They were both chosen as apostles by Jesus, and were eyewitnesses of his entire ministry.—Matt. 10:2-4

MARK AND LUKE—NOT APOSTLES

Mark, also known as John Mark and Marcus, was not one of the twelve apostles, and probably was not a disciple of Jesus during his ministry. He is first mentioned in Acts 12:12 as being the son of Mary, whose house Peter went to after his miraculous release from prison. (vss. 1-19) It is presumed by some Bible historians that Mark was a young man at this time, and became a follower of Jesus because of the impact upon him of Peter's miraculous

deliverance. So positive was the effect of Peter's experience upon Mark that a short time later he was chosen, along with Barnabas, to accompany Paul on his first missionary tour. (vs. 25) Later, when writing his first epistle, Peter reflects on the special bond he had with Mark, calling him, "my son." (I Pet. 5:13) From these records, therefore, it may be reasonable to suppose that Mark received much of the information for his Gospel account from Peter, who, like Matthew and John, had witnessed firsthand the ministry of Jesus.

Luke, also called Lucas in Philemon 1:24, was likewise not one of the twelve apostles. He may have received much information for his Gospel account from the Apostle Paul. Paul, of course, was not a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry, and, in fact, became a devout persecutor of Christians. However, after his conversion he was given many revelations concerning the ministry of Jesus, and could have easily passed much of this information on to Luke.—II Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 1:11,12

Several other circumstances also lend themselves to the thought that Luke received a majority of his material for the Gospel which bears his name from Paul. First, by comparing Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-3, it is evident that Luke was the author of both books. Second, as the writer of the Book of Acts, and in humility, Luke never mentions his own name. Third, beginning with chapter 16, shortly after the start of Paul's second missionary tour, and throughout much of the remainder of Acts, Luke uses the plural pronoun "we" when describing the experiences which Paul, and others who were traveling with him, encountered as they journeyed from place to

place. By using the word “we” on so many occasions, it is evident that the author, Luke, was with Paul for a long period of time. Luke was also a physician, and may have attended to certain of Paul’s physical needs as they traveled together. In Colossians 4:14, Paul calls Luke “the beloved physician.” Finally, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul’s last epistle, he says, “Luke is with me.” Written from prison in Rome shortly before his death, Paul’s words confirm the close bond he felt toward Luke, a loving and invaluable companion over a period of many years.—II Tim. 4:11

WHEN WRITTEN

From the foregoing we understand that all four Gospel writers had access to much of the same information, whether by firsthand knowledge such as with Matthew and John, or, in the case of Mark and Luke, having had this imparted to them by others of the apostles. We believe, too, that their writings were each guided by the power and influence of God’s Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we see that John’s record stands out in many ways as different from the other three Gospels. One of the key reasons for this, we believe, is with regard to the approximate times that the four Gospels were written.

Opinions as to when the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written vary among Bible historians. However, a reasonable suggestion which has historical merit is that these three were all written no later than the mid-AD 60s. The great Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire began in AD 66, and culminated in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Gospels of Matthew,

Mark and Luke go into substantial detail concerning Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's fall and the Temple's destruction, yet none of the three accounts refer to those events as having already taken place at the time of their writing. Therefore, we have reasonable evidence to conclude that Matthew, Mark and Luke were written prior to the start of these tumultuous events. Though they each recorded Jesus' prophetic words concerning these things, the events themselves had not yet taken place.

While the three synoptic Gospels appear to have been written sometime prior to the mid-AD 60s it is generally held that John wrote his Gospel account significantly later. We may reason upon this in several ways. We know that John also wrote the Book of Revelation, and in our opening text he states that he was on the Island of Patmos when he saw that vision and wrote it down. Many New Testament as well as secular historians maintain that John was exiled to Patmos by authority of the Roman emperor Domitian near the end of the first century, perhaps between AD 90 and AD 95. This means that the Book of Revelation would have been written sometime subsequent to that. If John wrote his Gospel account in conjunction with recording the vision of Revelation, either shortly before or after, that would have placed it much later than the writings of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In another line of reasoning, we recall that when Jesus was on the cross, he gave John responsibility over his mother Mary. (John 19:25-27) We do not know how long Mary lived after Jesus' death, but it could have been upwards of 25-30 years, which would have taken up much of John's life until the

mid-AD 60s, thus possibly delaying the writing of his Gospel to a later date.

In a third line of thinking about the dating of John's Gospel record, numerous historians claim that John served as an elder in the church at Ephesus for a substantial period of time, and in fact, was still serving in that capacity when he was exiled to Patmos. With some interest, we note that in the listing of the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1:11, each of which John was instructed to send a specific message, Ephesus is the first city mentioned, from which the other six cities were no more than eighty miles away. If, indeed, John had been an elder at Ephesus prior to his exile on the island of Patmos, he would most likely have been familiar with all seven cities to which he was instructed to write. There is no Scripture which states that John was an elder at Ephesus. If true, however, this may have also pushed to a later date his Gospel account.

Because of certain parallels in style, and even some similar wording in certain verses of both writings, the Book of Revelation and the Gospel of John were probably written in close proximity time-wise (compare John 21:24; Rev. 1:1,2; and 22:18). Thus, most authorities place the writing of John's Gospel sometime between AD 90 and AD 100, and that he wrote it either from Ephesus, shortly before his exile, or from Patmos, shortly thereafter.

There is, admittedly, a certain degree of speculation in the above analysis, and not all Bible historians agree in their conclusions. Yet, certain critical points seem to have clarity. John's Gospel was likely written some period of time after Jerusalem and the Jewish

Temple were destroyed, and significantly later than the other three Gospels. John's Gospel does not contain any reference to Jesus' prediction about Jerusalem or the Temple's coming fate, which supports the conclusion that these events were a matter of history by the time John wrote. He thus would have seen no need to mention Jesus' prophetic words of doom and desolation upon Israel, since it had already come to pass. John also did not write of Jesus' scathing condemnation of the Jews' religious leaders as the other three writers had done. Those leaders, likewise, would have long since been off the scene. As Jesus had promised, Israel's house was now desolate, and John knew the sad reality of those words.

UNIQUE FEATURES

One of the unique features of John's Gospel is that it makes no mention of Jesus' institution of the Memorial Supper celebration, though Matthew, Mark and Luke all discuss it in detail. This may seem surprising, given the importance of that event. By comparing all four Gospel accounts, the Memorial institution, though not mentioned by John, would properly fit within the thirteenth chapter of his Gospel record. As we consider why John made no mention of this, it perhaps relates to his much later writing.

John, along with the other apostles, was with Jesus in the upper room at the time of the Memorial Supper, and thus would have known firsthand the details of its establishment. He most likely knew also the detailed accounts which Matthew, Mark and Luke had recorded many years earlier, as well as the instructions Paul had "received from the

Lord,” as recorded in I Corinthians 11:23-28. By the time John wrote his Gospel, the brethren had been keeping the Memorial celebration for some sixty years. He perhaps did not see a need to repeat the instructions a fifth time, and thus left those details out of his written account.

Though John did not record the Memorial Supper institution, he did include an important sermon Jesus gave concerning his “flesh” and his “blood,” found in John 6:26-65, which was not included by any of the other Gospel writers. In this important account, Jesus spoke concerning the “bread of life,” and the requirement of his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood. He explained also that the meaning of this was not to be understood literally, but that to eat and drink of him means to “live by” him, and the “words” that he spoke are to be eaten and appropriated. His literal flesh, Jesus said, “profiteth nothing.”—vss. 57,63

By recording Jesus’ discourse on this subject, John provided the essence of what it really means, in daily practice, to “eat” of Jesus’ flesh and “drink” of his blood. The apostle does this rather than focus on the specific instructions already recorded by numerous other writers. Thus, we see that John’s perspective on the subject of the Memorial Supper was from a daily, spiritual application of its principles, rather than the specifics of its annual observance. Perhaps, from his vantage point some six decades later, John saw that the Memorial celebration had turned into something of a ritual and he, therefore, wanted to place greater emphasis on the spiritual lessons involved. These important words of Jesus would have been missing from the Gospel

record if not for John and his later perspective on the matter, as guided by the Holy Spirit.

We see a similar difference in how John approaches the subject of the Holy Spirit, compared to the other Gospel writers, and to Luke's historical record in the Book of Acts concerning the Day of Pentecost. Much of Matthew, Mark and Luke's focus on the Holy Spirit was as a miracle-working power, which was manifest in outward ways and by special gifts. This emphasis was very understandable during the early years of the Christian church, in order to show with clarity that this was God's doing, and not man's.

John's focus on the Holy Spirit, however, was much more personal. In his Gospel, John quotes certain statements of Jesus in which he speaks of: worshipping the Father "in Spirit and in truth;" the Spirit that quickens us; the "Spirit of truth;" and the Holy Spirit as a "comforter" or helper. (John 4:23; 6:63; 14:17,26) In his first epistle also, John writes how God abides in us by his Spirit. He additionally identifies the Holy Spirit as an "unction," or anointing, from God, and that we know this, not by having miracle-working powers, but by inward development. (I John 3:24; 2:20) None of the other Gospel writers speak about the Holy Spirit in these deeply personal ways.

INWARD WORK

The above examples of John's unique perspective should not be understood to be in any way critical of the other Gospel writers. By the time John wrote, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the miracles of healing, and speaking in foreign tongues, had likely come to an end, having served the divine purpose. However, the inward work of the Christian would continue,

and become increasingly more important, as the Gospel Age moved forward.

It is this greater spiritual focus which, more than anything else, makes John's Gospel so unique. He was the last living apostle. The Jewish people had been scattered, and Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. Rome was beginning to exert greater influence over Christianity, and John no doubt saw much trouble for the true church on the horizon. Although Christianity was well established by this time, John saw serious challenges which lay ahead. When given the vision of Revelation, though he did not understand it to a large degree, John must have concluded that there was much yet to happen before Christ's kingdom would be established, and the throne of David restored.

LONG-TERM LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

John's viewpoint can perhaps be best spoken of as being for the spiritual "long-term" benefit of the church, down to our very day. As he looked at what Matthew, Mark and Luke had recorded some thirty to forty years earlier, and prayerfully considered what now seemed to be some very important spiritually-focused lessons from Jesus' ministry, he put them down in writing. Thus, the church throughout the Gospel Age has been greatly blessed with lessons for their eternal benefit.

Referring again to the events in the upper room on the night before Jesus died, although John did not write concerning the Memorial Supper institution, we recall those things he alone recorded which are of great importance to the Christian. He recounted the lesson of Jesus' washing the disciples'

feet, and the giving of the great commandment to love one another. (John 13:3-17,31-35) These vital lessons were given by Jesus to his disciples the same evening as the Memorial Supper. John then recorded perhaps the most beautiful, as well as important, discourse and prayer given by Jesus during the entirety of his earthly ministry, which we find in John chapters 14-17. In each of these cases, John's Gospel provides the only scriptural record.

Thus we see that John, through the overruling guidance of God's Holy Spirit, saw the need and importance of making known certain critical facets of the divine arrangement which had not been previously recorded. Many of these, in particular, had to do with the development of the church throughout the many centuries of the Gospel Age, including our day. How thankful we are for this!

Let us appreciate the work of all the writers of the Scriptures, those who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Pet. 1:21) May we also especially treasure that which the Apostle John has given us. His unique perspective, recorded some thirty years after the records of the other Gospel writers, and some sixty years following Jesus' death and resurrection, has been vital to all of God's consecrated people. From the ending days of the Early Church, through the depths of the Dark Ages, to the increased light of the Harvest, and to the present moment, John's words have been of inestimable value to God's people. Let us be faithful to them, and to all of the inspired writing of the Scriptures, the Word of God, that we might be made "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—II Tim. 3:15 ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

N. Austin

Online Broadcast of Convention
Orlando, FL October 30,31

T. Krupa

Online Broadcast of Convention
Agawam, MA October 10

D. Rice

Online Broadcast of Convention
Agawam, MA October 10

T. Ruggirello

Online Broadcast of Convention
Agawam, MA October 10

*“Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.”
—Psalm 116:15*

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Brother Ron Chastain, Phoenix, AZ—September 5.
Age, 72

Sister Martha Davis, Los Angeles, CA—September 8.
Age, 94

Brother Henri Kowalczyk, Staffelfelden, France—
September 12. Age, 88

Sister Jasmine L. Shatananda, Mysuru, India—Sep-
tember 13. Age, 91

Brother Zdzislaw Kolacz, Wieden, Poland—Septem-
ber 13. Age, 88

Brother Bruce Clark, Buffalo, NY—September 15.
Age, 83

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

COLORADO CONVENTION, October, 2,3—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact M. Homolka. Email: cnmhom345@charter.net

WEST NEWTON CONVENTION, October 2,3—Due to various circumstances it has become necessary to cancel the 2021 convention. Contact L. Mlinek. Email: lmlinek@verizon.net

AGAWAM CONVENTION, October 10—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact F. Sansom. Phone: (860) 861-6881 or Email: elshaddai144k@sbcglobal.net

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 30,31—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact J. Kuenzli. Phone: (321) 442-1862 or Email: jkuenzli@cfl.rr.com

MILWAUKEE CONVENTION, November 7—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact D. Farchione. Email: debfarchione@aol.com

NEW HAVEN CONVENTION, November 7—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact A. Suraci. Email: annasuraci@comcast.net

SAN DIEGO CONVENTION, November 20,21—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact R. Brand. Email: blatbrand@aol.com

CHICAGO CONVENTION, January 1,2—LOCATION TO BE DETERMINED—Contact C. Martire. Phone: (312) 925-5434 or Email: christina.martire@gmail.com

My Consecration Prayer

Beloved Father, hear my plea—

This humble prayer to thee.

I long to be thy child this day

To serve thee acceptably.

Though steep and rugged be the way,

Thy loving Son, thine own,

Walked on before this self-same way,

Yea, trod the path alone!

He hung upon a shameful cross,

Taking each sinner's place;

He shed his blood—gave up his life

To save the human race.

I hear thy call to me so now

I give my little all—

This contrite heart—altho I feel

My offering far too small.

Thou promised if I'd walk with him

Each step the narrow way,

Thou wouldst grant me grace for ev'ry trial

And strength anew each day.

Thy promises are sure I know,

I claim them for my own.

Help me, Father, that I might be,

The seed that thou hast sown.

—Carol K. Hindle

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 55

