

Announcing Good News

“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

—*Romans 10:15*

THE PHRASES IN OUR

opening verse, “preach the gospel” and “bring glad tidings,” are both translated from a Greek word which means to “announce good news.” Our text further identifies two items of this good news to be announced—“peace” and “good things.” Peace, as all can no doubt appreciate, brings to mind such thoughts as harmony, quietness and rest, whether these be of an inward nature or outwardly expressed. “Good things,” a very general term, is described by *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* as denoting that which is pleasant, agreeable, joyful, upright and honorable.

Of all the good news that has ever been reported in this troubled world, the most outstanding is that which was heralded by the angels at the birth of Jesus. To the shepherds who were tending their flocks that memorable night, there came the joyous proclamation, “Fear not, for behold, I bring

you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10, *English Standard Version*) This message of the angel has been heralded far and wide throughout the earth for nearly twenty centuries. Although many have been comforted by it, yet from the standpoint of practical reality there are many in the world today who likely question whether it was a true report.

In general, the questioning of good news seems to happen all too frequently. First, it is rare to see headlines which are positive. Indeed, there are many events taking place in the world that point out the myriad troubles, problems and struggles that mankind faces. These make the headlines, whether via television, newspaper, or the seemingly endless electronic sources for news, including social media. Second, when the rare item of good news does make the headlines, it is most often tainted with a “spin” of negativity in one form or another.

One recent example of this is the “good news” of the vaccine for the COVID-19 virus which has recently started to be administered. By all accounts, this is perhaps the best news any among mankind has seen or heard in the past year. Yet, the headlines often raise questions, whether justified or not, concerning such things as: the effectiveness of the vaccine; its potential side effects; and various perceived inequities in its distribution and administration. Thus, the people in general, as so often happens in today’s world, are confused and divided in their thinking on what might otherwise be considered truly good news.

TRUSTWORTHY NEWS

For those who put their faith and trust in the inspired Scriptures, there need not be any negativity, nor questioning, attached to the good news in its pages. God is the author of his Holy Word, and he tells us himself: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—Isa. 55:11

The good news of the birth of Jesus states that he was to be a Savior, who would save the people from their sins and the result of their sins. The Scriptures also explain that sin entered the world through "one man," Adam. Death for Adam, as well as for all his progeny, followed in its wake. (Rom. 5:12) When we are told, therefore, that the object of Jesus' coming was to save the people from their sins, we must understand the matter in harmony with the record of the origin of sin and the havoc of suffering and death it has wrought in the earth all down through the ages.

Furthermore, to get a clear picture of what salvation from sin and death implies, we must accept the fact of death. The term death as used in the Scriptures describes what we see taking place all around us day by day; that is, the breaking down of health and final demise of the human organism to the point where life no longer exists in it. Accompanying this experience of death there is mental and physical suffering, the disruption of families and all the other distressing circumstances that have plagued the human race throughout the ages.

To save the people from this would mean the destruction of all disease and its related suffering. It would also mean continued health and life for those who accepted the terms of salvation. Actual death, as well as the dying process, would be destroyed. With disease and death removed from the earth, there would no longer be a need for doctors, nurses, hospitals, druggists, nursing and rehabilitation facilities, and undertakers. Everything that is associated directly or remotely with sickness and death will be discarded.

The destruction of sin, sickness and death is the divine intent on behalf of mankind, and it is referred to in God's promises as the salvation which he has provided through Jesus, the Savior. One of the many passages of Scripture which clearly shows this is found in these words of the Prophet Isaiah: "The LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. ... And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."—Isa. 33:22,24

PARADISE LOST

The historical accounts of the Bible lay a foundation for a proper understanding of what is implied in salvation for the human race. These records tell us of the preparation of the Garden of Eden, and of the perfect pair, Adam and Eve, being put in that Garden with the understanding that it was to be their home, to enjoy as long as they continued to obey their Creator's law. Additionally, they were commanded to multiply until the earth was filled, and have dominion over it. In other words, as their

family increased, and their needs required it, they were to extend the borders of the garden until it embraced the entire earth. What a loving and glorious provision was thus made for these human creatures!—Gen. 1:26-30; 2:8,9,15

However, to attain all these blessings, they were expected to obey the Creator's law. They chose to disobey; and, as had been clearly stated to them in advance, they came under condemnation to death and were driven out of the garden into the unfinished earth to die. Thus they lost their home, and being deprived of the life-sustaining provisions of Eden, the seeds of death began to work. In due course, they went down into the tomb. (Gen. 3:1-24) Their children, born of imperfect parents, also shared the condemnation, and thus the entire race of mankind has been a dying world. Paradise was truly lost, but not forever.

PARADISE TO BE RESTORED

The term salvation becomes easier to understand when we keep in mind that it is descriptive of the restoration of the human family to that which was lost through the disobedience of our first parents in Eden. (Luke 19:10) They did not lose a home in heaven, because they had never had a home in heaven, and were not promised one. They were created human beings, adapted to live on the earth. They were provided with a beautiful earthly home, "eastward in Eden." It was only when sin entered that sickness and death became a part of human experience, and it has become such a deep-rooted, and long-lasting part that it is now often accepted as necessary and inescapable.

However, here is where the Scriptures bid us pause to seek guidance and comfort from its pages. In those pages we learn that in sending Jesus into the world to save the people from their sins it was for the very purpose of undoing the results of that tragedy in Eden. Furthermore, it was to restore humanity to the status they would have enjoyed as ever-living, perfect human beings, had sin not temporarily interfered.

If, therefore, we can visualize the earth filled with restored humanity worshiping God in the beauty of holiness; if we can picture mankind enjoying vibrant, youthful health, with not an ache nor a pain, not even the fear of such things; and if we can be assured that this condition of earth's society and people will continue forever—then we are beginning to grasp the significance of the good news of “peace” and “good things” of which our opening text speaks.

JESUS—A CORRESPONDING PRICE

Jesus saves the people from their sins by redeeming them, and the Heavenly Father sent him into the world for this purpose. Centuries earlier, God had promised he would do this, saying, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.”—Hos. 13:14

The word “ransom” in the New Testament Greek means “corresponding price.” When Jesus was made flesh he was the exact counterpart of Adam before he sinned, and could give himself in death as a corresponding price. (John 1:14; Gal. 4:4) Jesus paid the penalty for sin, which was death, by pouring out his perfect humanity unto death. (Isa. 53:12) The

Apostle Paul explains that as sin and death entered into the world through one man, Adam, so justification, freedom from sin, and life come also through one man, Jesus.—Rom. 5:12,18,19

HEAVENLY PROMISES

Jesus died as man's Redeemer nearly twenty centuries ago, and still people are infected by disease, undergoing suffering and eventually death. Those who accept Christ, and endeavor to please him, likewise die. Because believers in Christ become sick and die, even as the rest of mankind, to many it seems reasonable to believe that it was not the divine purpose to destroy what we call death, but merely to provide a state of bliss for believers after death. This alleged state of happiness is called heaven, and the general idea is that those who accept Jesus in this life go to heaven when they die, death being merely a momentary change from one state to the other.

It is true that the Scriptures do speak of a heavenly reward for those who accept Christ during this age, and who faithfully walk in his footsteps of self-sacrifice. However, the promises of this special reward apply only to the limited few who are willing to fully dedicate their lives in the divine service. This "little flock" class is promised joint-heirship with Jesus in the future kingdom which is to bless all the families of the earth upon the earth.—Luke 12:32; Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12

Jesus said to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2,3) This special place is not being

prepared for the whole world of mankind, nor is such a high reward offered to the people in general. It is only for those of the “little flock” who are willing to suffer and die with Jesus—their death being a sacrificial one.

It is this class that is referred to in the Scriptures as the church of Christ. Those who constitute the church class are, in the resurrection, to be made like Christ, their Head. Like him, they will be raised as divine beings, in the “express image” of the Father. (Heb. 1:3) Christ returns to receive them unto himself, and their union with the Master is likened in Revelation 19:7 to a marriage, Jesus being referred to as the slain “Lamb,” and the church as his “wife.”

LIFE ON THE EARTH

When the marriage of the Lamb and his heavenly bride takes place, then will go forth the message of good news prophesied in Revelation 22:17. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. ... And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” When the proclamation goes out to come and “take the water of life,” it will not be an invitation to join the heavenly hosts, but rather a call to life upon the earth. Earlier in this chapter, the symbolism given is that of a garden through which there flows a mighty river, and we are told that on either side of this river there are trees of life. (vss. 1,2) It is a reminder of the Garden of Eden, hearkening back to its blessings that were forfeited because of sin.

The church of Christ, then united with him as his bride, will share in the dispensing of these

blessings of life. Although Jesus went away to prepare a place for the church, humanity in general had a place prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This home was lost, but it is to be restored during God's coming kingdom, when Christ and the church will reign over the earth.—Matt. 6:10; Rev. 5:10; 20:6

RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

This earthly kingdom is described by the Apostle Peter as the “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:20,21) The word “restitution” signifies restoration, and it is the restoration of all that was lost in Eden on account of sin that is to be accomplished in this kingdom arrangement. Thus, the fulfillment of God's promises given through his holy prophets of the Old Testament is what will also make good the announcement of the angels on the night Jesus was born.

Now we can see why the blessings of life did not become immediately available when Jesus died as man's Redeemer. It was because of the time set aside in God's plan for the selection and development of those who would share with Jesus in the work of restoring the world. Meanwhile the world has had to wait. However, the waiting has not been to the detriment of any, for, as the angels said that the good news was to be unto “all people,” so all are yet to have the blessings of salvation and life made available for them.

“All people” includes all who have died, who are to be awakened from the sleep of death to receive the promised blessings. The Apostle Paul spoke of

the time when “there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts 24:15) How utterly futile would be any plan for the blessing of the world of mankind that did not provide for the raising of the dead! Sin, sickness and death have been the agencies that have marred the happiness of mankind, and those who have lost loved ones could never be fully happy unless they were restored to life.

JESUS, THE SAVIOR

God, through the Prophet Isaiah, said, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” (Isa. 45:22) In the New Testament we are shown that all such promises are to be fulfilled through Jesus, whom the angels announced as the Savior. Paul declares that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was highly exalted and given a “name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:9-11

The apostle also connects God’s oath-bound promise made to Abraham to bless all nations with the coming and work of Jesus as the Christ and Savior. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) Here, Christ is clearly identified as the “seed,” promised so long before to Abraham, who would bring to pass the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Gen. 22:18

Later, in the same third chapter of Galatians, Paul reveals that the church of Christ will share with

him in the work of blessing mankind, being counted as part of the “seed” class. He states to the footstep followers of the Master, “Ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s”—that is, if you belong to him—“then are ye Abrahams’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:28,29) How wonderfully all the promises of both the Old and New Testament thus complement each other and combine in their testimony to assure us of the verity of the good news heralded by the angel!

EARTH FORMED TO BE INHABITED

In Isaiah 45, where we noted earlier God’s oath to save the people, we also are assured that his purpose in creating the earth had not changed. We read: “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.”—Isa. 45:18

God first revealed his purpose to have the earth inhabited by man when he commanded Adam and Eve to “multiply and fill the earth.” (Gen. 1:28, *ESV*) The fact that death temporarily blighted the human family does not mean that it will be permitted to permanently interfere with the divine purpose. Through God’s program of redemption centered in Christ, all kindreds of the earth will be able to look unto him and be saved; that is, have the opportunity to be restored to all that was lost in Eden.

CONSIDERING THE POOR

In a prophecy concerning God’s coming kingdom under Christ, David writes, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time

of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth.” (Ps. 41:1,2) In another psalm, Christ, the new king of earth, is declared to be one who will consider the poor, and who will then bless the needy and the helpless ones of earth. (Ps. 72:2,4,12,13) As true belief in Jesus even now implies the acceptance of his standard and practice, even so will it be in the next age when his kingdom is in operation.

We can see why it is said by the psalmist that those who consider the poor are the ones whom the Lord will then “keep ... alive” upon the earth. It means that such have truly accepted Jesus, and are endeavoring to conform their lives to his righteous laws, which are centered in love. The coming kingdom will establish laws which will help the poor and needy, and bring blessings to all. All those who come into line with these arrangements will, from the heart, find themselves delighting in the spirit of love, sympathy and helpfulness which will then be prevailing. All such will continue to live, not by being taken to heaven, but by being restored to health and eternal life here upon the earth.

DELIVERED IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE

It is noteworthy that the promise of Psalm 41:1,2, associates the kingdom blessings of life upon the earth with the “time of trouble.” This time of trouble may be the same as mentioned by the Prophet Daniel and quoted by Jesus—that great time of trouble with which this present age is now ending. There is a similar promise to this which reads, “Seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.”—Zeph. 2:3

We are surely now living in a great time of trouble, “such as never was since there was a nation,” “nor ever shall be.” (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) It is the time described in many of the prophecies as the day of God’s vengeance upon the unrighteous governments and institutions of earth. (Isa. 34:8; Jer. 46:10) Its purpose is the overthrow of Satan’s empire of selfishness, sin and death, in order that, in its place, there may be established the Messianic kingdom of righteousness. It is a time of distress now, with little “good news” in the earth, but the future will be glorious, for it means that the time of salvation and blessing for the world is near. The Prophet Isaiah refers to this day of God’s vengeance, and its outcome saying, “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.”—Isa. 35:3,4

God’s salvation for the people will come following the day of vengeance with which this present age comes to an end. Hence, when God caused the angel to announce the birth of Jesus with the proclamation that he was to be a Savior, it was with the knowledge that the salvation thus provided would not be available for the world in general until after the overthrow of Satan’s empire at this end of the age. Thus seen, God’s plan has not been a failure, but, is working out exactly as he designed that it should.

It is truly “good news” to realize that God has full control of earth’s present situation, and is soon to display his mighty power through the authority of Christ and his bride, the church. Thus will be brought

in a joyous tomorrow, when gladness will come to stay, because the causes of sadness will be destroyed. To this the prophet agrees, saying: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. ... And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:5,6,10 ■

