

Deliverance Drawing Near

“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”

—*Luke*

*21:28, Wilson’s
Emphatic Diaglott*

THE ENTERING OF A new year is always a reminder that time marches on, and time is an important consideration in our outlook as Christians and students of prophecy. The servants of God in every age have been out of harmony with the world around them. They have been pained by the sinful and unjust practices of the ungodly, and because of their own imperfections have groaned within themselves, longing for the time to come when the downward course of sin would be arrested, and deliverance from its corrupting influences would come to them

and to all mankind.

The questions, “How long?” and “When?” and their equivalents, appear many times in the writings of the prophets and apostles, and God’s reply is always that the reign of sin and death will not continue forever. The expressions, ‘last days,’ ‘the time of the end,’ the ‘latter days,’ and others, gave assurance that in the Divine plan a new dispensation was coming, in which righteousness would be enthroned and sin and death destroyed.

God’s assurances of this final triumph of right over wrong are recorded throughout the Bible, beginning with Genesis 3:15, where the statement is made that the “seed” of the woman would bruise the serpent’s “head.” This hope is amplified by God’s promises to Abraham that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

Through Moses, God promised to send a great “Prophet,” and Isaiah prophesied, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder.” (Deut. 18:18; Isa. 9:6) Daniel prophesied, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.”—Dan. 2:44

When Jesus came, he was accepted by his disciples as the One of promise. To them it seemed that the long-awaited time for the Divinely promised deliverance had come. John the Baptist announced the presence of Jesus with the statement, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:2) A better translation of the original Greek in his statement would be, “The Royal Majesty of the heavens has approached.”—*WED*

To the disciples it seemed certain that there was to be no further delay. They believed that the “kingdom of God should immediately appear.” (Luke 19:11) Jesus understood this situation, and to prevent them from being too greatly disappointed, he related the parable of the pounds, in which a “certain nobleman” went into a “far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and [later] to return.”—Luke 19:12

The disciples evidently recognized that Jesus, their Messiah, was the ‘certain nobleman’ of this parable, and that he was telling them in this parable that he was going away, and that the kingdom which they believed ‘should immediately appear’ would not be established until he returned. They did not understand that his going away involved his death, so they were quite unprepared for this sudden termination of his ministry.

Nevertheless, on the supposition that Jesus was leaving them and returning later to establish his kingdom, they went to him on the Mount of Olives, and inquired, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [Greek, *presence*], and of the end of the world [age]?” (Matt. 24:3) Here we have the question again, ‘When?’ and how will we know—what evidences shall we look for—that the age of waiting has ended, and that you have returned to set up the long-promised kingdom?

Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew contain Jesus’ reply to these questions, and Luke’s report of the Lord’s great prophecy of his return and the end of the age is found in chapter 21 of his Gospel, of which our text is a part. “When” you see the signs I have outlined “begin to come to pass,” Luke reports Jesus as saying, “Then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption [Greek, *deliverance*] draweth nigh.”—vs. 28

Here we have one of the most definite assertions found in the Bible concerning the time for the establishment of Christ’s kingdom. It is ‘when these things begin to come to pass.’ It is very important, therefore, that we ascertain what these things are which so definitely identify this

time for which the saints of God in every age have so hopefully waited and longingly prayed.

Let us examine briefly some of these things—the signs referred to in verses 24 through 27 of Luke’s Gospel, chapter 21. Verse 24 reads, “They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The first part of this text is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Israelites among the various Gentile nations.

While the literal city of Jerusalem was then destroyed, its destruction signified the overthrow of the whole Jewish polity and the complete subjection of the people to Gentile domination. Actually, the nation had lost its independence more than six centuries before this—in 606 B.C.—when their last king, Zedekiah, was overthrown, and the people taken captive to Babylon.

When Jesus said, ‘Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,’ he was merely saying that the nation which had lost its independence in the days of Babylon would remain captive, and continue to be persecuted, ‘until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.’ This is one of these things which we should see begin to come to pass if we are to be assured that our deliverance is near.

Has this prophecy begun to be fulfilled? We believe so. But let us not read more into the prophecy than it says. We know from other promises of God that wonderful blessings of health and peace and life and joy are in store for Israel. We know that the time will come when he will “make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” (Jer. 31:31-34) We know, too, that while Israel will be the first to have these kingdom blessings made available to them, the Gentiles will share in the blessings in God’s due time.

Jesus said nothing about these kingdom blessings in this prophecy. All he said was that Jerusalem, emblematic of the nation as a whole, would no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles. Since the treading down of the nation began with the loss of its sovereign independence, its restoration to independence would fulfill Jesus’ prophecy. And Israel is now a free nation—a nation among nations—and has been given this status by the United Nations of the world.

The free Israel of today is not a large nation. Jesus did not say it would be. She does not possess all the promised land—this is not implied by Jesus. The liberated Israel is not free from problems—serious problems—but Jesus did not say she would be. Just like every other nation on earth today, Israel is perplexed and fearful. Like every other nation, she has acute economic problems. And, like every other nation, she is burdened with debt and further draining her resources in an armament race. Furthermore, she has within her own borders, and adjacent to them, enemies that seek her downfall, using terrorism and suicide bombings to make day-to-day living fearful.

Jesus did not say that Israel would escape the problems that plague other nations and not have enemies when she first became free. He indicated only that Israel would no longer be trodden down; that her status of bondage as a nation, which began in 606 B.C., would be changed; that she would again be free to conduct her own affairs and make her own laws; that’s all—and certainly we have seen this begin to come to pass.

POWERS OF THE HEAVEN SHAKEN

Verses 25 and 26 describe two signs which are closely related. Jesus said there would be “signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.” And on the earth, he said there would be “distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring.” Because of these things Jesus said that men’s hearts would fail them for fear; “for,” he added, “the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

It seems evident from these two verses that the signs in the ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ and ‘stars’ are what Jesus refers to as ‘the powers of the heavens’ being shaken. This, it appears, is one of the contributing causes of men’s hearts failing them for fear. It is not the literal heavens that are ‘shaken,’ any more than it is the roaring of the literal sea and waves to which Jesus refers in this prophecy.

It is the symbolic heaven and earth that are involved, the same heavens and earth mentioned by the Apostle Peter when he wrote, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”—II Pet. 3:10

The figurative ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ which pass away with a great ‘noise’ in the ‘day of the Lord,’ are the spiritual and material aspects of the social order which must give place to the kingdom of Christ, the “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) Just as the literal heavens exercise a powerful influence over all life on the earth, so the symbolic heavens through the centuries of this present evil world have exercised a large measure of control over the people.

This has been done through religious institutions which have been recognized as a spiritual influence; spiritual, that is, in the sense of claiming a higher authority than the dictates of human laws. The church-state governments of Europe are a good example of this arrangement; but even where these have not functioned, the Christian nations have been subject to the restraints of religious viewpoints and influences. This, indeed, has been true also in non-Christian nations, although their concepts of right and wrong have varied somewhat from those of Christendom.

One of these things which Jesus foretold would take place at the end of the age and the time of his presence was, ‘The powers of the heavens will be shaken,’ that is, religious institutions and concepts would lose their control over the people. Have we seen this begin to come to pass? In many countries throughout the world, religion still exercises much influence in the affairs of the people. Nevertheless, we would be blinding ourselves to reality if we did not recognize that the powers of the heavens are beginning to be shaken, and that this disturbing development is contributing to the fear that fills the hearts of man today.

Atheism has increased in Christian nations. Those dominated in the past by the USSR in the communist world were told that religion is the opiate of the people. Since the demise of communism, religion has returned to these nations, but the effects of atheism have been damaging. Large areas of the world once under much religious restraint have seen this power of control almost completely broken.

Adding to this trend, many people in the religious world were shocked to learn about the scandalous behavior of Roman Catholic priests as pedophiles. The Catholic clergy is not alone in sex abuse scandals. Other religious groups have been exposed as having similar problems. In every country there has been a breakdown of religious and moral standards.

There has been an increase in crime, juvenile delinquency, as well as corruption and dishonesty in business and government.

On the horizon, another part of the religious heavens has become explosively active. Muslims are committed to convert the world to Islam. Holy wars have been declared, such as Afghanistan's Muslim clerics against the United States of America. In turn the United States has declared war against al Qaeda, the Muslim organization led by Osama bin Laden, responsible for the terrorist attacks destroying New York's Twin Towers, and has bombed Afghanistan. President Bush is contemplating declaring war on Saddam Hussein of Iraq to destroy his hidden arsenal of weapons.

Meanwhile Israel is enduring terrorist attacks by suicide bombers and is trying to employ military force to stop it. A situation now exists where liberal Israelis have turned into advocates of total war against the Palestinians, and moderate Palestinians cheer the suicide bombers. No one knows where or when the next attack of terrorism will occur in the world, and a great fear is widespread among all the people. At the time of this writing a terrorist bomb killed 200 people on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Truly, as Jesus said, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." (Luke 21:26) There is fear of biological warfare, chemical warfare, and use of nuclear bombs. It is feared that these are in the possession of Iraq.

We see this sign of Luke 21:25,26 begin to come to pass. Only those who are watching the "sure word" of prophecy (II Pet. 1:19) can see this beginning with an understanding of what it means. And how heartening is that understanding! It means that our deliverance 'draweth nigh.' That deliverance from the bondage of sin and death for which God's people throughout the age have waited and prayed is at hand. This means, also, that the deliverance of the whole world from the rulership of Satan is near. For this too, we thank God.

Meanwhile, the world also sees. But, unlike the watchers who 'look up' and 'lift up' their heads, their hearts are filled with fear as they contemplate what they feel will be the inevitable result of the complete breaking down of all religious and moral restraints. We now see the beginning of this sign, and we rejoice in the evidence it gives that our deliverance is near. As it progresses, the world will ultimately recognize

the significance of what is taking place. Jesus said, “Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”—vs. 27

With the symbolic sun, moon, and stars in the ecclesiastical heavens completely obscured so far as their power to control is concerned, the world will see only a ‘cloud.’ It will be in those symbolic clouds—and by means which Divine providence will direct—that the presence of earth’s new King will be recognized. At this juncture in the Divine plan, the ‘new heavens’ will take control, and through the administrative agencies of the new symbolic earth—to begin with the resurrected Ancient Worthies—God’s promised blessings of peace and joy and life will begin to flow to the people as a mighty “river of water of life.”—Rev. 22:1-3

So, as we enter the new year it is with hope, and confidence, and joy, for we know that deliverance is near. Just how near, the Lord has not revealed. For some of us it may be within the year. It doesn’t really matter too much, for we know that in any event we do not have much longer to wait.

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Setting Right Priorities

Key Verse: “Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”
—Mark 10:21

*Selected Scripture:
Mark 10:17-27*

MANY QUESTIONS WERE asked of Jesus during his earthly ministry. One that he particularly utilized to give an important lesson was that asked of him by a young Jewish ruler who, having caught up with Jesus in his travels, inquired, “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17) Jesus knew that this was a noble question, and so proceeded to remind the young man of many of the commandments of the Old Testament (vs. 19), which evidently pleased him for the moment. He quickly responded, “Master, all these have I observed from my youth,” (vs. 20), perhaps thinking that he had met the qualifications needed in order to obtain eternal life.

The young ruler quickly learned that simply keeping the “Thou shalt[s]” and “Thou shalt not[s]” of the Jewish Law was not enough. In the Key Verse of this lesson, Jesus pointed out that he still lacked something. In addition to everything he had done to keep the Law, he must also sell those things which he owned, and give the money to the poor. Not only this, but he must then take up his cross, and follow Jesus. This no doubt surprised the young man, as there was nothing in the Jewish Law that required such acts of humility and sacrifice. “He was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.” (vs. 22) As much as he desired to attain eternal life, and as faithfully as he had kept the Law, he could not bring himself to keep the additional requirements laid out by the Master. His possessions evidently meant more to him than he was willing to give up.

Jesus proceeded later to warn his disciples about the potential problems that would come to those who, having earthly riches, desire to enter into the kingdom of God. The analogy he used is quite remarkable, for he said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (vs. 25) The disciples knew that this literally would be an impossible feat, so they asked, “Who then can be saved?” (vs. 26) Jesus was not referring to a literal camel going through the eye of a literal needle. Rather he referred to a particularly low and narrow gate in the walls of Jerusalem that a camel could go through only by being completely unloaded of its burden and, bowing down, crawl through the small opening, the ‘needle’s eye.’

Jesus’ lesson to his disciples, and to us, was that regardless of what amount of riches we may have, in order to enter the spiritual phase of the kingdom we must completely divest ourselves of these earthly burdens and cares, and humbly seek to do his will in all of life’s experiences. The more of this world’s riches, honor, and influence that we possess, the more difficult it will be—although not impossible (vs. 27)—to sacrifice these things. Knowing this, should cause each of the Lord’s true followers to look at their priorities, to see whether they are directed toward earthly or heavenly things. As Jesus said in another place, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—Matt. 6:19-21

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Purposeful Friendships

Key Verse: “Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”
—*Luke 10:41, 42*

Selected Scriptures:
Luke 10:38-42;
John 11:20-27, 30-32

alone? bid her therefore that she help me.”—Luke 10:40

Jesus’ response to Martha is contained in the Key Verses, and indicates that her work of serving to his temporal needs was commendable, but Mary’s desire to hear the Word of God was of a higher motivation, and more important for the spiritual needs of the mind and heart. Her friendship with Jesus was of a higher purpose and tended toward spiritual growth. It is a lesson which shows us that our friendships with others in the body of Christ should be primarily along spiritual lines, with temporal and earthly conversations taking a much less important role. Jesus prayed to his Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) One of the important ways we become sanctified by the Truth is to spend time dwelling upon it in conversation and fellowship with our friends in the school of Christ.

THREE SPECIAL FRIENDS of Jesus during his earthly ministry were Martha, her sister Mary, and their brother Lazarus. This lesson focuses particularly on Jesus’ experiences with Martha and Mary. His initial encounter with them is recorded in Luke chapter 10, where it states that as Jesus traveled, he entered a village and was invited by Martha to their home. Martha, being a hospitable hostess, became busy preparing the meal for their guest while her sister Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to his teachings. As this continued, Martha became irritated with her sister and said to Jesus, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve

We later come upon another experience between Jesus and these two sisters as the result of the death of their brother Lazarus. This moving account is recorded in John chapter 11. Jesus had returned to Bethany to visit and console his beloved friends. Before he came to their house, Martha went out to meet him and said, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” (John 11:21) This was not a complaint on Martha’s part, but merely a statement of fact. Indeed, Jesus was not there when Lazarus died, but, if he had been, Martha had faith that he would have healed her brother from his sickness. We note that Martha’s faith and perception of spiritual things had grown significantly since her earlier encounter with Jesus, when she was busying herself with temporal duties. Now her focus was on higher things, even in the midst of the great tragedy of the loss of her brother.

We see the faith in spiritual things in the exchange of words between Martha and Jesus, “I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (vss. 22-27) Truly, Martha had listened to the teachings of Jesus and had a spiritually purposeful friendship with the beloved Master, Jesus.

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Failure and Restoration

Key Verse: “When they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.”
—*John 21:15*

Selected Scriptures:
Luke 22:31-34, 54-62;
John 21:15, 17

AS JESUS PREPARED HIS disciples for his imminent death and departure, he knew that Satan would be close at hand, wanting to stumble and discourage his followers. Although he spoke specifically to Peter, Jesus’ words were really applicable to all his disciples, “Behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31,32) Peter, impetuous as always, replied that he was ready to go with Jesus to prison, and even to death.

As admirable as were Peter’s words, Jesus could read his heart, and knew that Peter was weaker in faith than was evidenced by his bold claim. He said to Peter, “I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.” (vs. 34) As unbelievable as it might have seemed based on Peter’s confessed faith, Jesus’ words proved to be prophetic. Later, during the night, after Jesus had been betrayed and turned over to the elders of Israel, Peter’s test came. “A certain maid beheld him [Peter] as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how

he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.”—vss. 56-62

After his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples on a number of occasions for the primary purpose of rekindling again their faith in him as their Master, and to give them instructions to be at Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost to receive the special blessing of the Holy Spirit. One of these appearances, recorded in John 21, seemed to be directly for Peter’s benefit, as he was now considering going back into the fishing business. After fishing all night and not catching anything, the resurrected Jesus appeared and, as he had done so many times before his death, performed a miracle which produced a net full of fish. He then sat down to eat with the disciples, and turning to Peter, spoke the words contained in the Key Verse. Not coincidentally, Jesus repeated the same question ‘lovest thou me?’ two more times. It grieved Peter that he was asked three times about his love for Jesus, but it served as a humbling reminder of his earlier three denials. Jesus did not punish, or even criticize, Peter for his earlier denials. He rather instructed him: “Feed my lambs. ... Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15,16) It was only a few weeks later that Peter, his faith restored and filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly preached to thousands of Jews on the Day of Pentecost. See Acts 2:14-40.

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The Epistles of John and Jude

IN ADDITION TO his Gospel account of Jesus' ministry, the Apostle John wrote three letters, or epistles. The first is styled a "general" epistle because it is not addressed to any particular group or individual. In the fourth verse of chapter one, John states his reason for writing the letter—"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." What are 'these things' which he writes in order to give the brethren fullness of joy? One of them is mentioned in the three opening verses of the epistle. We quote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The 'Word' of life which John refers to is the '*Logos*' of life—the Word, or *Logos*, which he writes about in the first chapter of his Gospel, which, he explains, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us." (vs. 14) All the apostles understood clearly that Jesus had a prehuman existence, but John is the only one who speaks of him as the Heavenly Father's *Logos*, or mouthpiece. John was evidently deeply impressed with this viewpoint, for the first chapter of his Gospel is devoted to it, as well as these opening verses of his first epistle.

In verse five of this opening chapter John writes, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." In verse nine of the second chapter, we read, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now."

Thus John indicates that 'light' manifests itself by love, and 'darkness' by hatred. "God is love," John tells us. (I John 4:8) "God is [also] light." (ch. 1:5) These single-word definitions of the characteristics of God

would not give us a very clear understanding of him except as we find them enlarged upon throughout his Word.

Light is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of Truth, and the word Truth embraces the entire Divine plan for the redemption and restoration of a lost race. Every feature of that plan is prompted by Divine love. It was because God loved the world that he sent his Son, the *Logos*, to be man's Redeemer. Every detail of his plan whereby the benefits of this gift will reach and bless the people, is a further manifestation of his love.

Since darkness, the absence of truth, is manifested by hatred, and love is the manifestation of light, or truth, John could properly say that 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.' Christian love, then, is not just an abstract principle. Neither is it an indefinite feeling of emotion. It is, rather, the outworking of the example of unselfishness we see in God as day by day we endeavor to learn the Truth and obey it. John wrote, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him."—ch. 2:5

Just as John seemed especially inspired by the thought of God's love, he was also impressed with the importance of the outgrowth of love in the lives of God's people. So throughout the letter he touches upon this theme again and again. We quote a few examples: "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."—ch. 2:10,11

"This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."—ch. 3:11

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death."—ch. 3:14

"Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."—ch. 3:17,18

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born [begotten] of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the

world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”—ch. 4:7-11

“God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”—ch. 4:16-18

In these various texts we get a fairly comprehensive view of the manner in which Divine love will affect the life of a Christian. It reflects obedience to God’s Word. It prompts one to self-sacrifice on behalf of his brethren. The last text quoted speaks of a love which gives ‘boldness in the day of judgment.’ This is not a reference to the world’s future judgment day of a thousand years, for Christians will not be on trial then. Together with Jesus they will be the judges at that time.

In the previous verse (15) John wrote, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” For one in John’s day to make this ‘confession’ required great courage. We recall that one of the charges the religious leaders brought against Jesus was that he claimed to be the Son of God. Jews who later espoused his cause and confessed that he was the Son of God would also be hated and persecuted by their countrymen. Gentiles making this confession would be looked down upon more than ever.

It required boldness—courage—to take this stand. The Greek word translated judgment in the expression, ‘boldness in the day of judgment,’ is *krisis*. *Strong’s Bible Concordance* defines it as meaning ‘decision.’ If we translate John’s words literally, then, he would say that love gives one boldness in the day of decision. In Christian experience this day of decision, or trial, begins with consecration and continues until death. Every day is a challenge, a trial, a test, of faithfulness. Every day boldness is needed, a boldness that is born of love for God, for his Truth, for his people.

John had the proper understanding of love. He did not see it as something which should cause the Christian to compromise on issues of truth and righteousness. He admonishes us to “try the spirits,” or

doctrines, which are presented to us. He says, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.”—I John 4:1-3

This is a straightforward statement which shows no inclination to compromise. And this must be understood in the light of John’s own explanation of the manner in which Jesus came in the flesh, as we find it in the first chapter of his Gospel. In this chapter he did not say that Jesus became incarnate in flesh, but that he was ‘made flesh.’

Someone during the Dark Ages who was not satisfied with the way John explained this matter, endeavored to help matters by injecting an interpolation into the fifth chapter of his epistle. This addition to the inspired Word is found in verses seven and eight. It is an attempt to insert the doctrine of the trinity into the Bible, but all scholars agree that the passage is spurious and does not appear in the earlier Greek manuscripts.

One of the superb statements of John, found in this letter, reads: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”—ch. 3:1-3

JOHN’S SECOND EPISTLE

John’s second letter was written to “the elect lady and her children.” (vs. 1) We have not certain knowledge of who this Christian lady was. Verse thirteen indicates that she had a sister, and that her sister had children. The letter reveals that she was a very devoted Christian, with great love for the Lord and for the Truth. John told her that he rejoiced greatly “that I found of thy children walking in truth.”—vs. 4

In verses five and six he admonishes the ‘elect lady’ to “love one another,” and then explains, “This is love, that we walk after his commandments.”

The main purpose of the letter seems to have been to caution this sister in the Truth against allowing her kindness and generosity to work injury

to the cause of Christ. False teachers were plaguing the church. Tradition has it that the ones particularly alluded to in this letter were Basilides and his followers. Their heresy was in denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. According to John's first letter, this meant that they were not of God, so were to be shown no cooperation of any kind.

John wrote, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."—vss. 10,11

In the action thus commanded by John, we have the boldness of love manifested. It no doubt required courage for John to give what might easily be construed as harsh advice. It would require even greater Christian strength on the part of the elect lady to carry out the instructions. Perhaps, unwittingly, she had already been entertaining those opposed to the Truth. If so, it would be doubly difficult for her to take the bold stand which the apostle urged.

It would not be overemphasizing the importance of the Lord's providence to believe that John's attention was called to this situation in a manner to make necessary this short letter, not only that the elect lady might benefit, but that the entire church throughout the age might have an authoritative precedent to guide them in matters of this kind.

The principle involved is very understandable. First, all we need do is to ask ourselves where we would draw the line in matters of faith and practice. If we decide that it would be wrong for us to believe and preach certain views, or to conduct ourselves in certain ways, then it would be equally wrong to render assistance in any manner to others who may be doing so. Love does not demand that we put hindrances in the way of those with whom we cannot cooperate, but it does prevent us from cooperating with them.

JOHN'S THIRD EPISTLE

This third and last letter by the Apostle John was addressed to "the well-beloved Gaius, whom," John wrote, "I love in the truth." In verses three and four he wrote, "I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

John's reference to Gaius as one of his 'children' indicates that he was the one who had first presented the Gospel to him, and that it was under John's teaching that he became one of the disciples. The Apostle Paul also used this affectionate manner of speech in referring to his 'son' Timothy.

The immediate purpose of the epistle seems to have been to request Gaius' cooperation in caring, at least temporarily, for some brethren who were moving into the territory where he lived. (vss. 6-8) John commended these brethren very highly. According to tradition, Gaius was a wealthy man, and verse six indicates that he was using his resources faithfully to the glory of God.

An interesting sidelight appears in the letter. John explains that he had written to the church—evidently where Gaius attended—about this matter, but had received no reply. He blames this lack of interest on Diotrophes, "who loveth to have the preeminence among them."—vs. 9

John promised that if and when he came himself, he would "remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church."—vs. 10

Demetrius was evidently one of the leading brethren for whom John was asking asylum, and he assured Gaius that he was a brother of good report. John gave his personal recommendation, and said, "Ye know that our record is true." (vs. 12) Perhaps the important lesson of this epistle is the one stated by the apostle when, in writing to the Hebrews, he said, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."—Heb. 13:2

THE EPISTLE OF JUDE

This is another "general" epistle, since it is not addressed specifically to a certain church or individual. Jude, or Judas, the brother of James, was one of the twelve apostles. His purpose in writing the epistle is stated in verse three, which reads:

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The reason Jude deemed it important to exhort the brethren to ‘earnestly contend for the faith’ was the fact, as he reveals, that “certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”—vs. 4

In his condemnation of these ‘ungodly men’ who were mingling with the brethren, Jude uses language almost identical to that in II Peter 2:1-19. Evidently he had been impressed with Peter’s arguments and felt he could do no better than to follow his line of reasoning and use the same Old Testament examples of ungodliness.

Some have endeavored to use Jude’s reference to “Sodom and Gomorrha” (vs. 7) to prove the erroneous doctrine of torment in a fiery hell. He speaks of them as suffering “the vengeance of eternal fire.” But this is poor reasoning. In the first place, the ‘fire’ referred to by Jude was not ‘hellfire.’ Besides, the people of Sodom and Gomorrha were not tormented by it, but destroyed.

Nor were they forever destroyed, because Jesus taught that in the day of judgment it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha than for the Jewish cities which rejected him. (Matt. 10:15) Sodom is mentioned by the Prophet Ezekiel, who gives assurance that her people will be restored to their “former estate.”—Ezek. 16:55

What, then, did Jude mean by saying that those cities suffered the vengeance of ‘eternal fire’? They were “set forth,” he says, “for an example,” suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Fire is used in the Scriptures to symbolize destruction, and everlasting destruction will be the punishment of all willful sinners. What Jude tells us is that the Sodomites were used by the Lord as an example of those who will suffer everlasting death. Because both Ezekiel and Jesus clearly teach that they will be raised from the dead, we know that the Sodomites themselves were not everlastingly destroyed.

In verse twenty-one Jude says, “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” And then he adds, “And of some have compassion, making a difference.” (vs. 22) Throughout his short epistle, Jude is very outspoken against those who oppose the Truth. He spares no words of condemnation, but now he

tempers his remarks with the admonition that the brethren should deal with the situation in keeping with the love and mercy of God. He realized that there were some who had been ensnared by the devil, and were not willful opposers of truth and of righteousness. So they were to make a difference, and endeavor to “save with fear” by pulling “out of the fire” those who gave the slightest evidence of wanting to do right.—vs. 23

Appropriately, in view of the subject matter discussed, Jude commends the brethren to “Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.—vs. 24

Dawn Bible Students Association

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Steadfast and Abounding

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
—I Corinthians 15:58

THE BEGINNING OF another year is always an appropriate time to consider anew those things which are so closely related to our standing before the Lord as his children, to whom belong the “exceeding great and precious promises” of the “divine nature.” (II Peter 1:4) We are to be ‘stedfast’ in the faith; we are to be ‘unmoveable’—not “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14)—and we are to abound in the

‘work of the Lord.’ How have we measured up to these principles of Christian character during the year that has ended and what are our resolutions concerning the year ahead? Are we zealously determined that in 2003 we will be more faithful to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren, than we have been in 2002?

Our position today as Truth-enlightened Christians is somewhat paradoxical. The prophecies of the Bible pertaining to the end of the age and the time of our Lord’s Second Presence are being so marvelously fulfilled in the fast-moving events of the world that it is not uncommon to hear the brethren say that we are now almost walking by sight rather than by faith. On the other hand, many years have passed since the time when the Lord’s people firmly believed the kingdom would be established. We are still going into another year with its unknown and uncertain outcome.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,” wrote the wise Solomon. (Prov. 13:12) The ‘deferred’ hope of the brethren concerning the glorification of the church and the establishment of the kingdom has caused a heartsickness among some, a sickness which manifests itself in a lack of zeal, perhaps, and a lack of steadfastness in the faith “once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) We all need to be on the alert lest this form of

spiritual sickness lay hold upon our own hearts, and we begin to wonder about the Truth, and as a result become “weary in well doing.”—Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13

By the Lord’s permission, the element of time has been a test to many of the Lord’s people. Certainly Abraham’s faith was tested by his long wait for the birth of Isaac, and he “died in faith” (Heb. 11:13), without seeing the real fulfillment of the promise God made to him concerning the blessing of all the families of the earth through his “seed.” (Gen. 22:18) John the Baptist triumphantly announced Jesus to be the promised Messiah, yet when circumstances developed contrary to his expectations his faith was severely tested, and he sent messengers to Jesus to inquire, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”—Matt. 11:3

After Jesus was raised from the dead, and his disciples realized that death had not had dominion over him, they inquired, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6) Although Jesus explained to them that the times and seasons were held in the Heavenly Father’s power, they still were confident that the fruition of their hopes was near. To them, the nighttime of sin and death was far spent, and the glorious new day of Christ’s kingdom was near.

The exact timetable of the progressive events of the new day are still being withheld from the Lord’s people. The Lord is merely testing our faith in him and in his precious promises, teaching us to put our trust more fully in him, and not to lean to our own understanding. “Let us,” then, as admonished, “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).”—Heb. 10:23

The Lord is always faithful to his promises. Our tests of faith often result from putting too much confidence in our own opinions. This was John the Baptist’s difficulty. Jesus had said nothing to him to warrant his belief that the Messianic kingdom would be immediately established, John’s viewpoint being based entirely upon his own deductions. John is not to be censured for his eagerness to see the kingdom established. This is the natural heart-longing of all who love righteousness and hate iniquity. The thought is beautifully expressed by the Apostle John. After being shown those marvelous visions on the Isle of Patmos, culminating in the establishment of the kingdom and the destruction of sin and death,

he heard the Lord say, “Surely I come quickly,” and John cried out from his heart, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”—Rev. 22:20

In Habakkuk’s prophecy he tells us of a “vision” that was to be written down on “tables,” a ‘vision’ which in “the end” would not “lie.” The Lord’s people are admonished to “wait for it,” because although it would seem to be slow of fulfillment, it would not actually “tarry.” (Hab. 2:2-4) Paul quotes from this passage applying it to the end of the Gospel Age, and time of our Lord’s return. (Heb. 10:37,38) We know that this vision is in reality ‘present Truth,’ and the fact that the Lord’s people are informed that it would not tarry suggests the foreknowledge of the Lord that to many in the end of the Gospel Age this vision would seem to tarry. To realize this should, in itself, help to increase our faith in present Truth.

A NEEDED LESSON

“Ye have need of patience,” wrote Paul, “that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Heb. 10:36) In the preceding verse the apostle wrote, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.” (vs. 35) There is the danger of losing our confidence in the Lord and in the Truth if we fail to wait patiently upon him. The passing of time, without seeing the kingdom established is a great test of patience.

That is why, as we come to the end of each year and enter still another, we are reemphasizing the reality of the Truth, and reminding ourselves of the importance of having our faith firmly established in the Word of God. Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple, said concerning the Lord, “There hath not failed one word of all his good promise.” (I Kings 8:56) The same is true now. Our understanding of the Lord’s Word may fail, but not the Word itself. This is an important lesson to learn.

How blessed it is to know that God is faithful! His good ‘promise[s]’ are all-comprehensive, in that they reveal his glorious plan of the ages for the blessing of all mankind, and cover every situation in our individual relationship to him. And not ‘one word’ has ever failed! His promises did not fail during the past year, and we can look forward with confidence this year to knowing that again he who has called us will be “faithful.” (Heb. 10:23) If we have been steadfast and unmovable, it is because we

have put our trust fully in the Lord, and have sought to be guided by his Word.

ALWAYS ABOUNDING

Steadfastness in the Truth leads to an ‘abounding in the work of the Lord.’ If we made the Truth our own because we have found it substantiated by the Word of the Lord, we will want to tell others about it. Do we have a burning desire to tell the whole world these blessed tidings? If so, it is one of the evidences of God’s favor, one of the signs that we not only have the Truth, but have received it into good, honest, and unselfish hearts.

The Truth is designed to mold our lives into the character-likeness of the Master, and it has also been given to us that we might be the Lord’s witnesses, ambassadors of the kingdom. Failure to use the Truth in either of these respects would denote a measure of unfaithfulness, and a consequent loss of the Heavenly Father’s blessing. Does the beginning of the year find us more humble, more kind, “more like our blest Master, and more like a child”? And as ‘children,’ are we abounding in the work of the Lord?

Our loyalty to the Lord and to the Truth is an individual and personal responsibility. Let us watch our own heart condition, and our own standing before the Lord, rather than that of our brother. It is no evidence of steadfastness on our part to be continually criticizing the expressions of others. This is not the work of the Lord in which we are to abound. We are, of course, to be on the alert to assist one another as together we walk in the narrow way, but we cannot help a brother by condemning him.

“NOT IN VAIN”

Paul says that our ‘labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ This should be of great encouragement to all steadfast and abounding Christians. Darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. (Isa. 60:2) The darkness hateth the light. Satan, who blinds the minds of the people, is still the “god of this world.” (II Cor. 4:4) We should not expect that, under these circumstances, the Truth will be favorably received by very many. Nevertheless, we are to let our light shine, abundantly so, knowing that our efforts will accomplish the Lord’s design and therefore will not be in vain.

The Lord continues to be good to his people. He has allowed us to continue witnessing for him by various means, such as radio, television, the internet, public meetings, and personal contact. This abounding has been enjoyed by the brethren not only in the United States, but in many other parts of the world, such as the countries of Europe, parts of India and Africa, Australia and South America. We know that these labors have not been in vain. The Apostle Paul said that they would not be.

One of the greatest joys in any Christian's life is to have the privilege of helping another come into the Truth. This joy is not experienced by very many individually, but cooperatively we all share in the general witness made possible because the brethren as a whole are abounding in the work of the Lord. And the joy which we experience now as a result of our feeble efforts to show forth the praises of the Lord is but a foretaste of that great rejoicing we will experience in the kingdom when together with our Lord and Head, we will share in that grand work of blessing 'all the families of the earth.'

THE FUTURE

The rich blessings of the Lord upon his people throughout the past year have prepared them for the year to come. Just as not one word of all God's good promises has failed in the past, we know that in the year before us he will continue to guide and strengthen those who put their trust fully in him. We know not the way that is before us, but he knows, and he cares, and will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly before him.

So far as we can see now the year 2003 should be another good year for bearing witness to the Truth. Plans are being made for many conventions—local, district, and general. Ecclesia activities are being planned in many places; and individually the brethren everywhere are looking to the Lord for guidance and help in doing with their might what their hands find to do in his service, and the service of the Truth and the Truth people.

The Lord's richest blessings will go to those who earnestly and faithfully seek day by day to know and to do his will. He will draw near to those who, regardless of the cost, have made their principal aim in life to know and to serve him. To Israel God said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, ... 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.”—Mal. 3:10

The tithing system practiced by ancient Israel is not binding upon the Lord’s people during the Gospel Age, but in principle it is still true that if we want to enjoy the rich blessings of the Lord, we must be faithful to him in all the ways he has outlined in his Word to be his will for us. Our wills are to be fully yielded to the doing of his will. Any holding back on our part, or any asserting of our own wills, even in the little things of life, will tend to close ‘the windows of heaven,’ hindering the free flow of Divine blessings into our hearts and lives.

The Lord’s will is revealed to us through his Word, so we need to study his Word to know his will. (II Tim. 2:15) This is the main purpose of Bible study, whether it be as individuals or in our class meetings. To learn the Lord’s will and then not to do it, is of no profit. We might think of each aspect of the Lord’s will as one of the ‘tithes’ which we have the privilege of paying to him; and if we want this year to be the best year in our Christian experience, let us determine that we will be more faithful than ever in bringing ‘all the tithes into the storehouse.’

To use the language of our text, if we continue abounding in the work of the Lord, we can be sure that his rich blessings will be abundantly showered upon us. Paul wrote, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” (II Cor. 9:8) Again, in I Thessalonians 3:12,13, Paul writes, “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming [Greek, *parousia*, ‘presence’] of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” Notice how Paul indicates the relationship of our abounding in love one toward another, and toward all, to having our hearts established so that we will be steadfast and unmovable.

If we are abounding Christians we will be following the admonition of Peter to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. “If these things be in you, and abound,” writes Peter, “they make you that ye shall neither be barren [*marginal translation*, idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord

Jesus Christ.” (II Peter 1:4-8) In verses ten and eleven, Peter concludes, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall [will always be steadfast and unmovable]: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

It is that ‘abundant entrance’ into the kingdom for which we are longing and praying. But first, we must make our “calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10), for those who will be with the Master in the kingdom must prove their worthiness of that high position. Through the Truth we have been called. It is because we responded in the spirit of full consecration that we were elected or chosen to run for the prize. But both our ‘calling and election’ would be of little avail if we fail to make them sure. The worthy ones who are with the “Lamb,” are described as those who are “called, and chosen, and faithful.”—Rev. 17:14

Dawn Bible Students Association

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

January 2003

An Inheritance Incorruptible

THE COMMON BELIEF of mankind in the Christian world is that our natural birth made us sons of God, with an immortal soul, and that at death we all automatically become spirit beings, more alive than ever. This is unscriptural and untrue. Actually we were born in sin, and shapen in iniquity. (Ps.51:5) This made us by nature, children of wrath, subject to death, extinction.

The Scriptures clearly show that it was not until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that the consecrated followers of Jesus could be begotten to a living hope. This hope would be an inheritance incorruptible, immortal, reserved, or preserved, in heaven. As stated by Peter: “Blessed be that God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy, has begotten us to a living hope, (hope of life—*Interlinear*)

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, preserved in the heavens for you.”—I Pet. 1:3,4, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

PRESERVED IN HEAVEN

The word ‘inheritance,’ according to the English dictionary, means ‘that portion or blessing that is possessed, or is to be possessed by one, by reason of its being handed down without its having been purchased by the possessor.’ One does not purchase an inheritance.

The richer an earthly estate, the more it excites the malice and diligence of deceitful men to deprive the rightful heir of it. The Apostle Peter comforts the heirs of this great salvation, assuring them that although our inheritance is excellent and precious, it is also certain and safe; ‘laid up’ where it is beyond the reach of all adverse powers—reserved, or preserved, in heaven. Our enemies, including the Adversary himself, cannot possibly attack our inheritance nor can they overrun and destroy us even though we are in their midst, for he who is for us is more than all that can be against us.—Rom. 8:31

NEW CREATION

The whole groaning creation has been waiting for something—unconsciously, perhaps—and is still waiting. For what? For “the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:19) It is waiting for these sons of God until their faithfulness unto death has been proved, and they are all actually in possession of that incorruptible inheritance—the Divine nature.

This Divine family of sons, consisting of our risen Lord and his glorified church, can rightly be termed a New Creation. (II Cor. 5:17) The making, or bringing into being, of this New Creation is a mighty and wonderful work. It is a work of surpassing strength and beauty, bringing into fullest action exhaustless resources of Divine power, sounding the depths of unfathomable wisdom, and compassing eternity in the stupendous purpose of God. This is indeed a Divine family, like unto our Heavenly Father’s own glorious nature, immortal.

THROUGH SUFFERING

Our inheritance is assured, ‘preserved in the heavens for you.’ But we remember our Lord’s words: “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall

drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matt. 20:22) The Apostle Paul explained, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” And, “if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3,5

This baptism into his death involves the full surrender of our will to him, consecrating our all to follow and obey him even unto death. With this burial, or immersion, of our will into the will of Christ, we are begotten by the Holy Spirit, and by the Word of Truth, to the new nature. As New Creatures in Christ Jesus we now walk in newness of life. As Jesus faithfully bore witness to the Truth, and demonstrated his loyalty in connection with it, so with all his people. As Jesus was faithful during this process (as a New Creature), through sufferings, so with each member of the true church.

WORTHY

Our training as footstep followers of Jesus is to the end that we become like him—conformed to his image—and we are to be proved worthy. At times we may find that growth in Christlikeness is slow and painful, especially when the flesh rebels against our Father’s discipline. It is true that the “flesh lusteth against the Spirit, . . . and these are contrary the one to the other.”—Gal. 5:17

“If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And, “if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” It is our privilege also to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—I John 1:7; 2:1; Heb. 4:16

Jesus, through the Revelator, has promised, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Thrones of earth cannot be compared with this glorious heavenly inheritance with Christ Jesus, our beloved Lord, beyond the veil.

PRESS ALONG THE LINE

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THUS RUN

Like the apostle, we must have intensity of aim and purpose for this High Calling, this incorruptible inheritance. We cannot drift into it. We, as with Paul, must give diligence to lay hold on this hope in Christ by growing in Christlikeness, and being active in our Father's service. This calls for energy and zeal. Picturing athletes running on a racecourse, it should be noted that just as the winner of the contest goes all out, earnestly—yet wisely—expending all available enthusiasm, energy, and zeal to gain the prize so to this same degree of earnestness and intensity of purpose we are exhorted to run.

"Do you not know, that those running in a race-course,—all indeed run, but one receives the prize? Thus run, that you may obtain." (I Cor. 9:24, *WED*) The Greek word here translated 'obtain' actually means 'to receive or obtain thoroughly or fully.' We are, indeed, to obtain in the complete and final sense.

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We cannot now fully comprehend what our glorious heavenly inheritance will be. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." (I John 3:2) It is truly an incorruptible inheritance! All the wealth of this world could not buy, nor purchase, our inheritance. Indeed, none of the riches of this world could buy even the Holy Spirit by which we are begotten and sealed, and

which is the earnest—assurance, or pledge—of our inheritance. All this is granted to us by Divine grace. “According to his abundant mercy” hath our Father begotten us, who, as stated in I Peter 1:3,5, “are kept [or guarded] by the power of God through faith.”

Continued implicit faith and loyal obedience to God’s Word and will are required. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection ... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 2:10; 20:6) This Divine family is none other than the “new Jerusalem,” the heavenly city, spiritual Zion, God’s dwelling place forever.—Rev. 21:2

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Dawn Bible Students Association

An Inheritance Incorruptible

THE COMMON BELIEF of mankind in the Christian world is that our natural birth made us sons of God, with an immortal soul, and that at death we all automatically become spirit beings, more alive than ever. This is unscriptural and untrue. Actually we were born in sin, and shapen in iniquity. (Ps.51:5) This made us by nature, children of wrath, subject to death, extinction.

The Scriptures clearly show that it was not until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that the consecrated followers of Jesus could be begotten to a living hope. This hope would be an inheritance incorruptible, immortal, reserved, or preserved, in heaven. As stated by Peter: “Blessed be that God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy, has begotten us to a living hope, (hope of life—*Interlinear*) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, preserved in the heavens for you.”—I Pet. 1:3,4, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

PRESERVED IN HEAVEN

The word ‘inheritance,’ according to the English dictionary, means ‘that portion or blessing that is possessed, or is to be possessed by one, by reason of its being handed down without its having been purchased by the possessor.’ One does not purchase an inheritance.

The richer an earthly estate, the more it excites the malice and diligence of deceitful men to deprive the rightful heir of it. The Apostle Peter comforts the heirs of this great salvation, assuring them that although our inheritance is excellent and precious, it is also certain and safe; ‘laid up’ where it is beyond the reach of all adverse powers—reserved, or preserved, in heaven. Our enemies, including the Adversary himself, cannot possibly attack our inheritance nor can they overrun and destroy us even though we are in their midst, for he who is for us is more than all that can be against us.—Rom. 8:31

NEW CREATION

The whole groaning creation has been waiting for something—unconsciously, perhaps—and is still waiting. For what? For “the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:19) It is waiting for these sons of God until their faithfulness unto death has been proved, and they are all actually in possession of that incorruptible inheritance—the Divine nature.

This Divine family of sons, consisting of our risen Lord and his glorified church, can rightly be termed a New Creation. (II Cor. 5:17) The making, or bringing into being, of this New Creation is a mighty and wonderful work. It is a work of surpassing strength and beauty, bringing into fullest action exhaustless resources of Divine power, sounding the depths of unfathomable wisdom, and compassing eternity in the stupendous purpose of God. This is indeed a Divine family, like unto our Heavenly Father’s own glorious nature, immortal.

THROUGH SUFFERING

Our inheritance is assured, ‘preserved in the heavens for you.’ But we remember our Lord’s words: “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matt. 20:22) The Apostle Paul explained, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” And, “if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3,5

This baptism into his death involves the full surrender of our will to him, consecrating our all to follow and obey him even unto death. With this burial, or immersion, of our will into the will of Christ, we are begotten by the Holy Spirit, and by the Word of Truth, to the new nature. As New Creatures in Christ Jesus we now walk in newness of life. As Jesus faithfully bore witness to the Truth, and demonstrated his loyalty in connection with it, so with all his people. As Jesus was faithful during this process (as a New Creature), through sufferings, so with each member of the true church.

WORTHY

Our training as footstep followers of Jesus is to the end that we become like him—conformed to his image—and we are to be proved worthy. At times we may find that growth in Christlikeness is slow and painful,

especially when the flesh rebels against our Father's discipline. It is true that the "flesh lusteth against the Spirit, ... and these are contrary the one to the other."—Gal. 5:17

"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And, "if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." It is our privilege also to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."—I John 1:7; 2:1; Heb. 4:16

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