

Be Thankful

“We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”
—II Thessalonians 2:13

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN the United States will celebrate the national Thanksgiving Day holiday this year on Thursday, November 23rd. It has been set aside as a holiday for most workers, and special services of thanksgiving will be held in many churches across the country to celebrate the occasion. Some will observe the day with the true spirit of thanksgiving to

our Heavenly Father for their many blessings. Others will take the opportunity to gather with family and friends with little thought given to the Lord, the giver of every good and perfect gift to his earthly creation.—James 1:17

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Those who have given themselves in full dedication to serve God count every day as one of thanksgiving for the abundant blessings they receive from him. They have been specially invited by our Heavenly Father to become members of the “bride” of Christ.

(Rev. 21:2,9) In his epistle to the brethren at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul addressed this special relationship when he wrote, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Thess. 2:14) One of the grandest gifts ever offered to anyone since the creation of the world is the high calling in Christ Jesus that has been extended during this age. Those who respond to this invitation are indeed richly blessed, and they realize that it is essential to express thanks to God every day of the year.

The apostle encourages this class of specially called followers of our Lord Jesus by saying, "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—II Thess. 2:15-17

ULTIMATE BLESSINGS

Considering the wonderful blessings that we have received from the Heavenly Father, we turn to Paul's words which were written to the Hebrew brethren who were also responding to the same high calling. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3:1) Being a partaker of the "heavenly calling" has been made possible through faith in the precious blood and merit of our Lord Jesus, who was offered on behalf of his footstep followers. "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures

of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”—Heb. 9:24

The redemptive merit of Christ’s sacrifice that was presented to the Heavenly Father on behalf of his footstep followers will be made available for the entire human family during his coming kingdom on earth. “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” (John 10:16) The good shepherd, Jesus, shed his lifeblood as a ransom price on behalf of all his sheep. This includes the little flock of faithful followers who are being called during this age, and then the larger flock of humanity who will respond to his voice under the terms of a New Covenant during the kingdom of Christ. (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13) During that blessed time, all hearts will be glad to give thanks and praise to our loving God.

THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS

When speaking of giving praise and thanksgiving to God, the Apostle Paul says that by Jesus Christ, “let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15) Our “lips” are used as a symbol of speech and communication with others. We communicate and make known the glorious Gospel message by using our lips in this manner, and those who have a desire to hear will respond to the words spoken. Additionally, when going to our loving Heavenly Father in prayer, we pour out our love and thanksgiving directly to him. This may be spoken with our lips or inaudibly expressed in our hearts.

We are thankful for whatever measure of spiritual or temporal blessings that we may have because of God's wonderful and loving providence towards us. As followers of our Lord Jesus, we are privileged to have the eyes of our understanding opened to behold the wondrous beauties of the Scriptures. We trust also in the blessed assurance that God's love will ultimately be manifested to the poor groaning creation in due time. In prophetic words, Hosea spoke of a time when all men would render thanks and praise to God. "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." (Hos. 14:2) The psalmist also wrote, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."—Ps. 150:6

CONTINUAL THANKSGIVING

The faithful followers of the Master are encouraged to have a consuming zeal in all that they do in the service of God and to render their heartfelt praise and thankfulness to him continually. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (I Thess. 5:18) "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6) "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:9,10) "Ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." (II Thess. 3:13) We should always be on the alert to do those things for our brethren that would be for their

highest spiritual welfare and not become weary in these efforts.

FORGET NOT HIS BENEFITS

The Psalmist David wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”—Ps. 103:1-5

These wonderful words express the depth of love, praise, and thanksgiving that David had for our loving Heavenly Father. The word “bless” in the psalmist’s expression “Bless the LORD” includes the thought of kneeling down as an act of adoration. David is thus stressing the appropriateness of humility before the Heavenly Father when offering our prayers and thanksgiving to him. Having a humble attitude toward God is wise counsel and of utmost importance to all of Jesus’ faithful followers. Again, we read, “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”—Ps. 95:6,7

OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD

We are dependent upon our Heavenly Father for all things that pertain to our consecrated walk in newness of life, both temporal and spiritual. In reference to the Lord’s people, we read, “They should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one

of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”—Acts 17:27,28

God extends to us the temporal blessings of life such as sunshine and rain, as well as food, raiment, and shelter. We also receive spiritual food that is necessary for our growth and development in the narrow way. He provides the Holy Spirit of power and of a sound mind for the consecrated class of Christians. (II Tim. 1:7) God also covers us with the robe of Christ’s righteousness, and this robe allows us to have a standing as a New Creature. (Isa. 61:10; Ps. 132:9) If we sin, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” who is the “propitiation [atonement, expiator] for our sins.”—I John 2:1,2

CORRECTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of the things we should be very thankful for is that, when it is necessary, our loving Heavenly Father will discipline our misguided actions and will send experiences for our correction in righteousness. The Apostle Paul explains this very special relationship in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. “Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening [Greek: disciplinary correction] of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”—Heb. 12:5-7

As New Creatures in Christ Jesus, our hopes, aims, and ambitions no longer appeal to the flesh

—the outward man that is by nature fallen. By contrast, the spiritual growth of the new man is being developed by the providential care and keeping of our loving God and the work of the Holy Spirit on our behalf. Concerning this transformational process, Paul states, “All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal [temporary]; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:15-18

SAVED FROM ADAMIC SIN

We should be ready always to give thanks to God for providing us with Jesus’ sacrifice as a ransom price for our sins. Jesus is the “propitiation,” or atonement, “for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2) We were born into this world to suffer the same sentence of death as all others. The psalmist wrote, “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”—Ps. 40:1-3

The God of all mercy and grace is permitting his consecrated people to endure difficult trials and

besetments as they walk in newness of life and as they sacrifice their humanity in the Lord's service. We understand that these experiences are necessary in order to be a joint-heir with Christ Jesus in the administration of his kingdom. These hardships of the narrow way prove and test their loyalty to the Heavenly Father. They are necessary to consume the dross of the old fleshly nature and to establish in their hearts the character likeness of their Master, Christ Jesus. Even while undergoing these trying experiences, they have much to be thankful for. In spite of it all, they live a richer, fuller, and more satisfying life than the most successful and contented people of the world.

A LIVING HOPE

By the Lord's unlimited grace, we have a true and lasting hope in this present world of confusion and chaos. The Apostle Peter spoke of this as a "lively," or living, hope. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen,

ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”—I Pet. 1:3-9

Our Heavenly Father has taken us into his own confidence and has revealed his ultimate plan and purpose for the restoration and reconciliation of the poor groaning creation. We are especially thankful to know that he is presently selecting from among the world of mankind a group of faithful followers of his Son, our Lord Jesus, to be the kings and priests in his millennial kingdom which we believe is drawing ever nearer.—Rev. 1:6; 20:6

A FAMINE FOR TRUTH

During the closing years of this present Christian age, the poor, groaning, human creation continues to put its trust in political leaders who speak of peace and brighter days under their leadership, even in the midst of world trouble and turmoil. Religious and spiritual leaders likewise have little in the way of satisfying answers, nor messages of comfort to give the people. The world has been passing through the prophetic troubled waters of a corrupt and dying society which has been largely based on human selfishness and pride. (Ps. 46:3) They long for a better time and day, but are unaware of the nearness of Christ’s promised kingdom of righteousness, peace, and security that will be administered under his control.

The Prophet Amos spoke of the famine for truth that would accompany the end of this age. “The days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a

thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst.”—Amos 8:11-13

A FEAST OF TRUTH

In contrast to the present famine of the Word of the Lord found in general throughout the world, divine power is being exercised on behalf of those, one here and one there, who genuinely hunger and thirst for truth and righteousness. We read of our Heavenly Father’s loving care on behalf of his consecrated people, “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” “He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.”—Ps. 103:5; 107:9

During the closing period of this present Gospel Age we have been sumptuously fed and watered with the refreshing and soul-satisfying portion of the riches and promises of God’s wonderful Word of Truth, spoken of by Jesus as “meat in due season.” (Matt. 24:45) The Prophet Isaiah adds, “The LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”—Isa. 58:11

ENLIGHTENED WITH TRUTH

This knowledge is refreshing to those of the Lord’s dedicated followers who are living during this present time, and we take new courage and hope as we see this “present evil world” passing

away. (Gal. 1:4) It gladdens our hearts even as we see the present distress of nations. Present darkness will soon give way to the glorious kingdom of light that will be ushered in to bring blessings to all the families of the earth. All men will be enlightened by the true light of Christ's kingdom during his righteous reign.—Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:20-25; I Cor. 15:21-26

The Prophet Joel spoke of God's promise to give the world his Holy Spirit at that time, saying, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. ... And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance." —Joel 2:28,32

GLAD TIDINGS COMING

Ere long the human family will receive the promised Spirit of God spoken of by the prophet. Through its holy influence upon their hearts and minds, mankind will benefit from the blessings promised under Christ's kingdom. The masses of the people will then voice their praise and thanksgiving unto our loving God for his ultimate plan and purpose to bless his human creation.

At that time, the New Covenant will be operational, governing mankind in peace, righteousness and equity for all. Then, the people will be lifted up from the miry pit of sin and death that marks our present world. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness;

the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: 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. 35:8-10

RENDERING OUR THANKS

We are thankful that a special day each year has been set aside to render thanksgiving and praise to God. It is a reminder of our humble position as we stand in awe before the great Creator of our world and the entire universe. Our lives should be full of heartfelt thanks every day of the year for the countless blessings that we receive from our loving Heavenly Father. We especially thank him for the privilege we have to take advantage of the many opportunities to seek understanding and grace, and to grow in the knowledge of truth and righteousness.

Thanks be unto our loving Heavenly Father for delivering us out of the realms of darkness, ignorance, and superstition, and for providing us the manifold blessings of enlightenment and peace. May we praise him for calling us to be members of the bride of Christ and granting us the unspeakable joy of joint heirship with his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the future administration of his righteous kingdom. “Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.—Ps. 100:4

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