

God's Great Gift

***"Thanks be unto
God for his
unspeakable gift."
—II Corinthians 9:15***

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS when the spirit of giving is more universally manifested than at any other time. How appropriate that Christians should remember that in God we have the greatest of all examples of unselfish giving. Indeed, the gift of his Son is so far beyond our ability to comprehend fully that it can be truly described as "unspeakable." Paul's reference to God's great gift was very timely, for he used it as a climax of his appeal to the Corinthian church for funds to be sent to their brethren in other places who were in need.—II Cor. 9:1-14

In the New Testament, the financial needs of the followers of Jesus is not a subject of significant discussion, although it is not entirely ignored. Jesus and the apostles had a treasurer. For a time after Pentecost, the disciples pooled their resources in a common treasury, to be used as needed by the brethren and for the work of spreading the Gospel message.

When famine conditions arose in Judea, the elders in Antioch did not hesitate to make a special collection of funds to help supply the needs of the brethren in the stricken areas. (Acts 11:27-30) In the same chapter as our opening text, Paul complimented the brethren at Corinth for their generosity, and assured

them that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. (II Cor. 9:1,2,7) In all these references, however, there is no indication that the church of that day engaged in specially planned campaigns of money-raising, nor that every meeting of the disciples for study and worship was made an occasion for taking up a collection. They were not ashamed to mention the subject when the need arose, but money-raising was not the major business of the Christian life.

In the Early Church, properly motivated gifts of financial support were a manifestation of the spirit of Christ in the hearts of those who had dedicated themselves to follow in his footsteps. In setting forth the terms of discipleship Jesus told the rich young ruler that he should “distribute unto the poor,” then added, “come, follow me.” (Luke 18:22) The Early Church understood that to follow in the steps of the Master meant giving everything to God, even life itself. He in turn would make them stewards of that which now belonged to him, including their time, strength, money—their all—to be used in his service.

Thus we find that the subject of giving to the Lord, whether it be for the furtherance of the Gospel, or for the spiritual or material needs of his people, is shown to be quite appropriate in the church. In our text the Apostle Paul lifts the matter up to a sacred position in the hearts of the Corinthian brethren by likening it to what our Heavenly Father has done for us and for the world by the gift of his Son. He first uses such expressions as: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly;” “Let him give, not grudgingly;” and “your liberal distribution unto them.” (II Cor. 9:6,7,13) Then Paul closes his appeal, saying, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

The apostle reminds us that God's gift of his beloved Son is the most precious of any and all gifts ever bestowed, costing our Heavenly Father more than has ever been equaled by any disciple of Christ. The extent of cost to God was approached only by Jesus, who, in following the example of his Father, gave himself to die on the cross that all might have an opportunity to live. It is this principle of giving, this true spirit of charity, or love, that is emphasized in the Bible. Its outworking in the details of our Christian lives will of necessity cause us to be unselfish and liberal in the use of whatever resources may come under our control as the Lord's stewards.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

In the act of proper, unselfish giving, both the giver and receiver are made happy. We know how much joy God's gift has brought to us, and this is just as true of our Heavenly Father. As stated by Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) The joy of both the giver and receiver is enhanced when the gift is specially examined and appreciated. Thus, our joy should be increased by recalling some of the virtues of God's unspeakable gift of Jesus. In doing so we are sure to find in him the one who is "chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely."—Song of Sol. 5:10,16

Jesus, given by his Heavenly Father to be man's Redeemer and Savior of the world, is identified in his prehuman existence as the "Word [Greek: *logos*]" by John. The apostle says concerning the "Word" that "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we

beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”—John 1:3,14

In Revelation 3:14, the Son of God is identified as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God.” The Heavenly Father, speaking to us through the psalmist concerning his Son, declares: “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” (Ps. 89:27) In another scripture, where the Logos is personified as “Wisdom,” he is quoted as saying, “The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. ... Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.”—Prov. 8:22-24,30

The testimony of the Scriptures is clear that the one whom our Heavenly Father chose to be his gift for the redemption of the world was the highest of all his creatures, the very beginning of his creation, and that he participated in all the remaining creative work. The Bible also indicates that the association of the Father and the Son was a very intimate one. The Son was constantly a delight to his Father, doing always those things which were pleasing to him. Their fellowship and mutual purpose are revealed in the Genesis account of creation, where we find the Father saying to his Son, “Let us make man in our image.” (Gen. 1:26) Who among us today would not thrill to have our Heavenly Father speak to us in such an intimate manner? Surely the partnership and love of God and his Son was hallowed and sweet, beyond the ability of the human mind to fully grasp.

It was this beloved Son whom the Heavenly Father elected to give for the redemption of the sin-cursed and dying race. No wonder that John, in writing about such a gift, emphasized the extent to which it manifests God's love for the world, saying that he "so" loved the world "that he gave his only begotten Son." (John 3:16) Among the angelic sons of God there were perhaps many who would gladly have served their Creator in this manner, and the "gift" of any one of them would not have been without cost to God, for he loved them all. However, he chose to give the one who meant the most to him, the one dearest to him of all his obedient and treasured creatures.

A gift reveals the love of the giver, not just because of the intrinsic value the gift may have, but also by what it represents to the giver. This is why Jesus called particular attention to the widow's two mites. (Mark 12:41-44) To the wealthy, two mites had little value. However, because it was all that the widow had, her gift represented a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice far beyond what was possessed by those who, out of their abundance, were able to give large sums without sacrificing their material comforts.

We know that in reality our Heavenly Father is not "poor." Poetically, the psalmist, in describing God's riches, declares that "every beast of the forest," and the "cattle upon a thousand hills" are his. (Ps. 50:10) The entire universe is God's creation and is owned and controlled by him. There is nothing that we can give to God that will increase his possessions, nor does our withholding make him poor. How, then, could any gift which he might provide be akin to the widow's two mites?

The Logos was God's only direct creation, so from this standpoint, giving him to be the world's Redeemer meant the giving of all that the Father had. While the Son in his prehuman existence was not on the divine plane of life and could not reach fully to the great heights of his Father's thoughts, he was the highest of all in the spirit realm. In him the Creator enjoyed a larger measure of fellowship and companionship than with any of his other angelic sons. Hence, to give him up to die, meant the giving of that which cost the Creator more than anything else.

ONLY THE FIRST STEP

As previously quoted, the Logos was "made flesh, and dwelt among us, ... the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14) The natural process of begetting and birth is something which our finite minds are incapable of fully understanding and explaining. To that extent, all life is in the realm of the miraculous. Similarly, we cannot understand precisely the manner in which the life of the Logos was transferred to Mary as a human embryo, and in due time born as a babe in Bethlehem.

In Philippians 2:8, Paul speaks of Jesus as being "found in fashion as a man." This suggests that he was no longer in the "fashion" of a spirit being, such as was the case in his prehuman existence as the Logos. This emphasizes how completely he was given up by the Father for a time. His being made flesh, however, was only the first step in the divine provision of the "unspeakable gift," in which God's boundless love for the fallen and dying human race would be manifested. The "Word," though now made flesh, was yet to give himself in death for the life of the world.

As a child, and until he was thirty years of age, Jesus no doubt gained an increased understanding of the fact that he had been born into the world for a special divine purpose. This is indicated when, in the Temple at the age of twelve, he inquired of his mother, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) However, not until he was thirty years of age, when he presented himself to John at Jordan to be baptized, did the Father communicate directly with him. At that time Jesus was assured of his true relationship to God by hearing the voice of his Father saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—Matt. 3:17

Here a sweet fellowship between the two was reestablished, and later Jesus said to his Father: I know that "thou hearest me always." (John 11:42) Of necessity, though, it was a limited communion. Jesus was no longer living on a high plane of spirit life. He was a human being, and his ability to comprehend his Father's thoughts was limited by his human mind. Indeed, his was a perfect human mind, but it was greatly constrained as compared with the knowledge and understanding he possessed as the Logos, that mighty one who shared in all the work of Creation.

In the former association of the Father and the Son, great works were done by them, creation and otherwise, but there is no reason to suppose that sacrifice and suffering were involved. Now it was different. Jesus was being offered in sacrifice, and the manner in which this must have affected the Heavenly Father is well represented by the experience of Abraham in offering up Isaac in sacrifice, as God had instructed him to do. It was a three days' journey for Abraham and Isaac before they reached

the land of Moriah, where Isaac was to be offered, and the account says that “they went both of them together.”—Gen. 22:6

Thus it also was with the Heavenly Father and Jesus. In unity of spirit and purpose, they went “together,” as it were, from Jordan to Calvary. Just as Isaac displayed no opposition to his father, and willingly allowed himself to be placed on the altar to be sacrificed, so it was with Jesus. As he walked together with his Heavenly Father during the three and one-half years of his earthly ministry, his chief concern was to do always those things which pleased his Father. Jesus was also conscious of the fact that the Father was close to him. (John 16:32) This companionship and communion of the Father and the Son, though limited by the fact that one was on the divine spirit plane, and the other a human being, must, nevertheless, have been sweet and blessed.

Nevertheless, as they journeyed together in spirit, only the Father understood in advance the full scope of physical and mental pain and ignominy which lay ahead for Jesus, and to which the journey toward Calvary was leading. Surely, when we consider all that was involved in this complete giving of his Son by the Father, it should help us the more to understand the depth of what Paul had in mind when he described it as God’s “unspeakable gift.” Truly it was a gift which was exceedingly precious and costly.

JESUS’ WILLINGNESS

Jesus’ own part in humbly submitting to his Father’s will in the great redemptive plan for the recovery of the fallen race is also an important consideration. He said, speaking of his Father, “I do always

those things that please him.” (John 8:29) This was so completely true that he was able to say on another occasion, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) His obedience would, in fact, seem to make the Father’s part in the sacrifice even more costly. Obedience, such as Jesus rendered, merits reward and blessing, not ignominy and suffering. The Father, however, endured seeing his Son suffer severely, knowing that thus on him would be laid “the iniquity of us all,” in order that a way of escape from sin and death would be provided.—Isa. 53:6

From the time of his baptism, Jesus’ sentiment was, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart,” and he began to realize the full import of his coming to earth. (Ps. 40:7,8) During his forty days in the wilderness he no doubt learned more of the details surrounding his all-important mission—that he was to die for the sins of the world. Later he explained to his disciples that he expected to give his flesh “for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) He knew now that in being “made flesh,” the body which had been “prepared” for him was “for the suffering of death.”—Heb. 10:5; 2:9

We know that Jesus’ understanding of the Father’s plan, and of his own part in that plan, was progressive. Near the close of his ministry he acknowledged to his disciples that he did not then know the time of his Second Advent. (Matt. 24:3,36; Mark 13:32) Seemingly, also, he did not fully comprehend the extent of mental ignominy and pain which he was to suffer in connection with his death until very near the end. Thus each experience which came to him would serve as a further test of his obedience

to the divine will, and how wonderfully victorious he was in them all!

ON THE CROSS

One of the most crucial moments for Jesus was when, as he hung on the cross, the crowd cried out, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Again, they cried, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." (Matt. 27:40,42) Here was a final opportunity on the part of the Father to take back the gift, or for Jesus to use divine power to deliver himself. To human thinking, it perhaps would have seemed appropriate for God to intervene and demonstrate to this sin-stained crowd that the one whom they were jeering at and crucifying was indeed his Son! Certainly, Jesus also could have thought to convince them that their conception of him was wrong, that he was not a blasphemer. He did not, but instead endured this "contradiction of sinners against himself."—Heb. 12:3

How little the people realized that by the Father not intervening in the matter, and Jesus' refusal to save himself, the two of them were, even in this most difficult hour, in full harmony and cooperation with each other. Indeed, in these very moments, the Father and his Son were providing the means of salvation for those responsible for the death of Jesus, as well as for all the families of the earth. What a Savior! What an "unspeakable gift" from the Heavenly Father!

In his final hours on the cross, Jesus continued to carry out the last remaining details of his earthly ministry, quoting several prophetic statements from the Old Testament which were now being fulfilled. (Ps. 22:1; 69:21) The last of these, from Psalm 31:5, was an expression of full confidence in his Father, as well as complete surrender to his will: "Father,

into thy hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) Jesus then took his final breath as a human being. Now the gift had been fully given. The Heavenly Father had not only given his Son to be made flesh, but had traveled with him all the way to his death on the cross, because he “so greatly loved” the world. —John 3:16, *Amplified Bible*

THE COSTLY METHOD OF GIVING

Our appreciation of God’s unspeakable gift is greatly increased by seeing the immeasurable love which motivated him to make available the atoning blood of the Redeemer for the Church and for the world. In this is a great lesson. The principle of divine love represented both by the gift and by the manner in which it was given is held out in the Word of God as the only proper motivating power in our lives as we endeavor to be conformed to the pattern set before us, in both the Father and the Son. We, too, are to give all, and are never to take our sacrifice off the altar regardless of the suffering which may be involved in our offering.

An example of how this principle operates in actual practice is the unselfish love of the Philippian brethren for Paul, as manifested by sending him a gift while he was in prison at Rome. (Phil. 4:15-18) Of what the gift consisted the Scriptures do not disclose, and it is not important. Our interest is in the fact that the Philippian brethren loved Paul and demonstrated their love by sending him a gift. Paul appreciated this, and indirectly alludes to it in his epistle, saying, “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more.” (Phil. 1:9) This was not a solicitation for another gift, but a compliment to their unselfish

interest in him as a servant of God and a brother in Christ. Their love had prompted the gift, and Paul wanted that same motivation to abound in all ways as they sought to know and carry out the divine will.

The gift itself meant much to the apostle. However, it was even more precious because of the great cost involved in its delivery. It had been brought to him by Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian church, who, because of the hardships involved in making the journey to Rome, had become seriously ill and almost died. In sending this faithful servant back to the brethren at Philippi, Paul wrote, "Receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me."—Phil. 2:29,30, *Revised Standard Version*

No wonder Paul appreciated that gift so greatly. In the example of Epaphroditus' sacrifice, he saw the same spirit as that manifested by the Father in the gift by which his love has been so wonderfully demonstrated. The gift of Jesus truly is unspeakable, but the further love of the Father as manifested in his manner and motive of giving, and the great cost attached thereto, is so overwhelming in its implications that our finite minds cannot comprehend it, much less be able to describe such love.

The only adequate expression of appreciation we can make at all, in the face of the love manifested by God's "unspeakable gift," is in the offering of our all to him—life itself. Let us, therefore, with no reservations as to what may be involved in the way of hardship and trial, daily present our offering on the altar of praise to him who is the greatest of all givers.—Heb. 13:15 ■