

The Privilege of Thanksgiving

*“It is a good thing
to give thanks unto
the LORD, and to
sing praises unto
thy name,
O most High.”
—Psalm 92:1*

EACH YEAR, STARTING IN 1863, one hundred sixty-one years ago, the fourth Thursday of November has been designated in the United States as a day of thanksgiving—this year that will

be November 28. True Christians are always glad to give thanks, and thus will be happy to render thanks to the Lord on this day. Indeed, if we are living up to our privileges, we will be giving thanks to the Lord every day. Paul wrote, “In everything give thanks,” and since we know that “all things” are working together for our eternal good, thankfulness will be welling up in our hearts and finding expression through our lips for every experience of life.—I Thess. 5:18; Rom. 8:28

All the Lord’s people appreciate the blessings which he continuously showers upon them. Giving thanks is one of the ways of expressing this appreciation. First, we give thanks to our Heavenly Father, but also, as a testimony of his goodness, we express

thanks among those with whom we come in contact. “It is a good thing,” our text declares, “to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises” unto his name. Here the thought seems to be that we express our thanks to the Lord, and sing praises with others—and certainly our songs of praise are expressions of thanksgiving.

David wrote, “That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.” (Ps. 26:7) This expression is found in a very interesting and revealing context. Opening the psalm, David wrote, “Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide.” (vs. 1) Neither David nor any other member of the fallen race has been capable of living up to God’s standard of perfection, but as the consecrated people of God it is essential that we maintain our integrity before him in the sense of always being willing and anxious to do right. Maintaining such an attitude before the Lord, we will want him to judge us, and to reveal to us those things in which we are not pleasing to him.

IN GOD’S STRENGTH

David knew that he could not maintain his integrity by his own strength. We, also, would fail in our own strength. It is only as we have faith in God’s willingness and ability to help us in our every time of need, and make use of his every provision to give us strength in him and in the power of his might, that, like David, we can have confidence that we will not “slide.”

David continues, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness

is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.” (Ps. 26:2,3) The psalmist was so desirous of being right in Jehovah’s sight that he invited him to examine and prove him. This was asking a great deal, for the psalmist would have no way of knowing what severe methods might be used to prove him, or what experiences the answer to this prayer might bring. However, he had two good reasons for making this request. (1) He was confident that God’s lovingkindness was before him. (2) He was walking in the Lord’s truth and knew that the truth would be his “shield and buckler.”—Ps. 91:4

The psalmist then expresses some aspects of his integrity. “I have not sat with vain persons,” he wrote, “neither will I go in with dissemblers.” (Ps. 26:4) With David, it was not a matter merely of refraining from fellowship with dissemblers, while at the same time secretly wishing that the law of his God did not prohibit him from doing so. It was more than this! “I have hated the congregation of evil doers,” he wrote, “and will not sit with the wicked.”—vs. 5

SHOULD HATE ALL EVIL

Not being acquainted with the circumstances which prompted this expression of hatred for evil, we can apply it only in principle to our own stand for God and for righteousness. We should apply this principle to all evil—to everything that is out of harmony with the Lord. We are not to have fellowship with any of Satan’s works of darkness, not merely because we are forbidden to do so, but because, like the psalmist, we hate evil. This is implied in being “conformed to the image” of God’s dear Son, of

whom it is written that he “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity.”—Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:8,9

In Psalm 19:12-14 we find David praying, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

The psalmist knew that the only way he could be truly innocent before the Lord was to have his God cleanse him from secret faults and keep him from committing presumptuous sins. His own part in this was in humbly and sincerely looking to the Lord to examine and prove him. Even then David could not be innocent in the sense of being free from all sin, but his heart could be pure. Upon the basis of this purity of heart intention, he knew that God would accept his devotions and his sacrifices. It was in such an attitude that he could “compass,” or embrace, the Lord’s altar; that is, offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord.—Ps. 26:6

A HEART TUNED TO THE LORD

As David reveals, his thanksgiving to the Lord was the inevitable result of his longing desire and resolute determination to maintain his integrity before the Creator. This indicates—and we believe that every dedicated child of God will affirm it from personal experience—that true and spontaneous thanksgiving to God can come only from a heart that is in tune with him.

We cannot be in rebellion against the Lord's instructions, resisting his providences, and at the same time have our hearts running over with true thanksgiving to him. Thanksgiving is the overflowing of hearts that have been emptied of self, and filled by the Holy Spirit through the written Word and the providential love of God with which we are surrounded. If the love of God has thus been "shed abroad in our hearts," we will find that it is indeed a good thing—yea, a very delightful thing—to give thanks unto the Lord.—Rom. 5:5

Viewed in the proper light, every experience of life is an occasion for thanksgiving. We are thankful for God's keeping power in our lives; that he has not permitted us to fall. We are thankful for the assurance that he will never leave us or forsake us; that having begun a good work in us, he will finish that work in his own due time, and through whatever agencies he may deem wise to choose.—II Pet. 1:10; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 1:6

In this respect our thanksgiving is both retrospective and prospective. We thank God for past mercies and for the hope of future blessings—those which we know will continue to flow from him to "usward" in ever-mounting streams of his lovingkindness and grace.—Ps. 40:5

THANKFUL FOR SPIRITUAL VISION

As our minds turn back we thank God that he "inclined" unto us. He heard our cry for help, lifted us out of the "horrible pit," and set our feet upon a "rock." (Ps. 40:1,2) There are millions of sincere people in the world who are seeking after God who

will not, in this present age, find him. It will not be until the Messianic kingdom that he will “incline” toward these. That will be the time of their “visitation.” (I Pet. 2:12) It is only “a little flock” that the Lord is now seeking, and how thankful we should be if he has given us opportunity to be of this small company.—Luke 12:32

Think what this means! While in the horrible pit and the miry clay we were alienated from God through sinful works—originally the sinful works of Adam through which condemnation came upon all his progeny. However, the Lord opened the eyes of our understanding, and thus enlightened through the Truth, he extended to us the high and holy calling of this Gospel Age. (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 1:18) Through faith in the blood of Christ, which alone could make us acceptable—a faith that was demonstrated by a full consecration to do God’s will—we received the assurance of reconciliation with God, and of no longer being alienated from him. (I Pet. 1:2,18,19; I John 1:7) What a continuous cause for thanksgiving this should be!

FURTHER BLESSINGS

“Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” opens the way to further blessings for which we should be daily thankful. Paul wrote concerning “this grace wherein we stand,” which causes us to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:1,2) Indeed, not only do we now have peace with God, and enjoy fellowship with him, but he has established our “goings” in the narrow way that leads to “glory and honour and immortality.” (Ps. 40:2; Rom. 2:7) We will, of course, have tribulations and trials, but this will help us to develop patience. If we continue

patiently to endure these experiences they will lead to a hope that “maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.”—Rom. 5:3-5

Having peace “with” God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by continued faith in his promises and their fulfillment, we gradually acquire the peace “of” God—that is, the same kind of peace God has. (Phil. 4:7) God enjoys peace, because he knows that his divine power and wisdom is in perfect control of every situation in his entire universe. We can have this same peace, this same tranquility of mind, through faith in his promises to love and care for us. We know that there is no circumstance in our lives that he is not capable of overruling for our highest good. We know, moreover, that while at times his providences may permit trials to come upon us, behind these is his smiling face of love which will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear.—I Cor. 10:13

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Paul expressed a similar thought when he wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 4:4-7, *English Standard Version*

The peace of God is a part of our present inheritance as Christians, and what a glorious portion it is! The world is filled with confusion and fear:

the strife of nations; the conflict of arms, real and threatened; economic insecurity; the uncertainty of friends; these all contribute to turmoil in the hearts of the masses of mankind.

It is not so, however, with those into whose hearts the Lord has shined with the Gospel and who have accepted this message and acted upon it. Just as God knows that in due time he will lead the world into its desired haven and that nothing can interfere with the outworking of his plans and purposes, so faithful Christians at this time know that he is fully capable, and abundantly willing, to give them bountifully of his love and care. Indeed, we can testify that day by day he is doing so. Is this not cause for the continual giving of thanks?

FOR EVERY EXPERIENCE

Our thankfulness should not be merely along general lines. Rather, each experience that comes to us affords an opportunity to give thanks. Let us continually avail ourselves of the provisions the Lord has made through his Word as well as the help of our brethren in Christ to increase our knowledge of his plans and purposes. Thus we will desire to give thanks to God for the better understanding we have thus acquired, and the better awareness of his will, all of which makes our fellowship with him more intimate and blessed.

If we have been faithful in the use of the various opportunities we have had to show forth the Lord's praises by making known the Gospel of the kingdom, we will be thankful for the experiences we have enjoyed in thus bearing witness to the Truth. (Matt. 24:14) Perhaps the Lord has used us to communicate

the Gospel to one who receives the message gladly. Truly, this would be a cause for thankfulness!

On the other hand, it may be that all our efforts to make known the glad tidings to others have seemed to fail. Perhaps those to whom we have shared the Gospel have turned away with indifference, or possibly have scorned or even persecuted us. This also is a cause for thankfulness, for such experiences are among the witnesses of the Spirit that we are the children of God. (Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:16,17) Jesus explained that no one could come to him unless drawn by his Heavenly Father. (John 6:44) Therefore, if those to whom we witness do not show appreciation of the message, it is because they are not presently being drawn by God.

We can be thankful, however, for the realization that a time is soon coming in God's plan when all people will be enlightened and given an opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness—the return road to human perfection and to reconciliation with God. (Isa. 35:8) At the same time we can be especially thankful that the Lord has drawn us and that we have been given “eyes” to see and “ears” to hear the joyful strains of his harmonious plan of salvation.—Matt. 13:16

Truly, the Lord is good to all of his people! The psalmist wrote, “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.” (Ps. 89:15,16) That we have been privileged to know the joyful sound of God's Holy Word is, in itself, an evidence that we are walking in the light of the Lord's countenance, and that his favor is upon us. Indeed, “it is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD!” ■