

The Better Things of Our Heavenly Calling

*“Ye are come ... to
Jesus the mediator of
the new covenant, and
to the blood of
sprinkling, that
speaketh better things
than that of Abel.”
—Hebrews 12:22,24*

AS WE STUDY THE Bible and make an effort to apply the things that it teaches, we are exhorted to be “rightly dividing the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) We are also thankful daily for the assur-

ance found in Jesus’ statement, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” (Matt. 13:16) Having our minds enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we have been enabled to comprehend that God’s plan provides, first, a heavenly salvation for a “little flock” who faithfully follow in the footsteps of Jesus, those who have responded to the call, “My son, give me thine heart.”—Luke 12:32; Prov. 23:26

We have come to appreciate that God’s plan also provides for the salvation of mankind in general,

and the hope of living in righteousness upon the earth forever. The promises contained in the Bible point out to us that the redeemed shall, in due time, “sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,” and will “long enjoy the work of their hands.” (Mic. 4:4; Isa. 65:22) This is God’s provision for mankind when they will be restored to divine favor, when all the families of the earth shall be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

Of the true church, the bride of Christ, it is declared that the members of this “little flock” shall, in the “first resurrection,” be raised heavenly or spirit beings, having attained to “glory and honour and immortality,” and become “partakers of the divine nature.” (Rev. 20:6; Rom. 2:7; II Pet. 1:4) The Apostle Paul says concerning the heavenly hope of the church: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”—I Cor. 15:50

Jesus promised his faithful disciples the night before his death, “I go to prepare a place for you” in “my Father’s house,” that is, in the courts of the heavenly realm. (John 14:2,3) The eternal home for the remainder of mankind, however, is the earth, having already been provided “from the foundation of the world,” and which “abideth for ever” as man’s dwelling place. (Matt. 25:34; Eccles. 1:4) Thus, we can appreciate that both aspects of salvation, whether the heavenly or earthly hope, are the result of the loving and gracious provision of the Heavenly Father. As the Scriptures point out: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”—I Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:4

BETTER THAN ABEL

The basis for both the heavenly and earthly hope set forth in the Scriptures is the willing sacrifice of Jesus as the “lamb of God,” a “ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (John 1:29; I Tim. 2:5,6) His willing sacrifice on Calvary’s cross assured the human race of forgiveness for Adamic sin, and their subsequent release from the bondage to sin’s penalty, death. (Rom. 5:12,18,19) Our opening text refers to Abel, who offered an acceptable sacrifice to God, and who was slain as a result by his brother Cain. Abel’s blood, the Scriptures state, called for vengeance upon Cain. (Gen. 4:4-15) Jesus’ blood, however, speaks of “better things”—mercy, forgiveness, redemption, and a full opportunity for reconciliation to God.

In Hebrews 12:25, the verse following our opening text, we read, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” These words are addressed to those striving to be of the church, the “body of Christ.” (I Cor. 12:12-14,27) They are a sobering reminder to us that the hearing and understanding of the word of the Lord brings with it much responsibility. “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required,” Jesus said.—Luke 12:48

Our opening Scripture also reminds us of the establishment of the promised New Covenant through Christ Jesus, the great teacher and Mediator of that covenant. It awaits inauguration until the end of this present Gospel Age and the completion of the church class. These will share with Christ in

the mediatorial work associated with the New Covenant on behalf of the remainder of mankind. The “blood of sprinkling” cleanses the members of the body of Christ at the present time, and in due time will also cleanse all mankind from the condemnation resulting from Adamic sin. Paul discusses the privileges and responsibilities associated with the blood of Jesus which the church class enjoys now, in advance of the world of mankind, in Hebrews 10:19-23. His words conclude with the exhortation, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).”

HEAVENLY VERSUS EARTHLY HOPES

In the Old Testament, there is no suggestion of a heavenly or spiritual hope for any of mankind except as given in highly veiled, prophetic language. The promises given to the faithful ones of old were all of an earthly nature. In Abraham’s case, for instance, we read, “The LORD said unto Abram, ... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.”—Gen. 13:14-16

The Apostle Paul distinguishes between the hope of the spirit-begotten church, founded at Pentecost, and those of all others. After listing many of the heroes of faith of past ages, he declares that although they had God’s testimony as to their faithfulness, “none of them received all that God had promised.

For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.” —Heb. 11:39,40, *New Living Translation*

The “better” reward which God has in mind for his faithful people of the present Gospel Age is beautifully given in these words of the Apostle John: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he [the glorified Jesus] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) It is far beyond anything that we can ask or think to be “like him” whom God hath highly exalted, “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.” (Eph. 1:21) We stand amazed at such grace! Moreover, we can realize that he who called us to become joint heirs with our Redeemer in his mediatorial kingdom has provided for blessings and joys untold in that heavenly state.

Following the reward of these faithful ones to the divine, spirit nature, and its associated glory, the worthy ones of ancient times will receive their reward of resurrection to human perfection. Under Messiah’s kingdom, those Ancient Worthies will be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) Finally, we are assured that all those who sleep in the grave, the entire world of mankind, will be raised from the death condition. “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth.” (John 5:28,29) Blessings and instructions will then descend to the world of mankind, who for so long have been mired in the grip of sin. God’s perfect law of love will be rewritten in the hearts and in the character of all the willing and obedient.—Isa. 35:1-10; Jer. 31:31-34

THE FIRSTBORNS PASSED OVER

When the due time came in which God purposed to deliver his people out of Egyptian bondage, the firstborn of the Israelites received a peculiar “salvation,” or preservation. The night before Israel’s deliverance, all of the firstborns were in danger of death and were saved only by residing in their homes, protected by the sprinkled blood of the slain Passover lamb on the upper lintel and side doorposts of their houses. (Exod. 12:1-30) By examining the New Testament, we see the significance of this beautiful picture. Paul tells us that Christ is “our Passover Lamb,” sacrificed for us. (I Cor. 5:7, *English Standard Version*) We each have had appropriated to us, by the mercy and love of God, the redemptive merit, or value, represented in the shed blood of Jesus. Further, we are to abide continually under that arrangement until the end of our earthly walk.

Just as the firstborn of Israel were to reside “under the blood” during the entire Passover night, we who aspire to the heavenly calling must remain under the covering merit of Jesus’ sacrifice during this present nighttime of sin, suffering and death in the world around us. Being thus faithful, we will be “passed over” and protected, as were the firstborn of Israel, and on account of the blood be accounted worthy to be members of the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”—Heb. 12:23

LET US CLEANSE OURSELVES

Our Heavenly Father has given many wonderful promises to those who truly love him and his dear Son, Christ Jesus. In II Corinthians 7:1 we are admonished that having “these promises,” we

should “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear [reverence] of God.” This is a similar thought to that expressed by the Apostle John when he wrote that those who have this heavenly hope, based on the promises of God, are to purify themselves. (I John 3:3) The possession of the promises to the extent of our readiness to inherit them fully, can be most notably found in that which we think upon. Paul counseled us along this line, saying concerning those things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy —“think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8

We have also been given these helpful words by the Apostle Peter: “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness.” (I Pet. 3:13-15) Let us lay claim to these promises, but also realize the responsibility, and at times the suffering, that comes with them.

It seems apparent that giving a “reason of the hope” that is in us is to be demonstrated not only by our words, but also by our meditations and daily conduct. The Scriptures speak along all three of these lines. The psalmist writes: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Ps. 19:14) The importance of Christlike conduct is brought to our attention by Paul, when speaking of his own daily walk, he

states: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”—Gal. 2:20

In another place, Paul speaks of those “who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Heb. 6:12) In order to claim the promises for our very own we must demonstrate an abiding faith in them, and also patiently endure whatever trials the Lord may see that we need in order that our worthiness of the promises might be manifested. The fulfillment of many of God’s promises belong to our present life, while others apply to our future inheritance beyond the veil. Thus, when the apostle speaks of inheriting the promises, he apparently had in mind both our present blessings as well as our future heavenly inheritance. What a magnificent prospect is assured for us by our Heavenly Father’s wonderful promises! Truly he has given us “good doctrine,” so that we forsake not his law.—Prov. 4:2

LOVE FOR OUR BRETHREN

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John wrote, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” (I John 3:14) These words should encourage each of us to search our heart’s intentions and motivations as we ponder these soul-searching questions. Is the witness of God’s Holy Spirit evident in our life? Do we love the brethren—all of them—or merely our favorites or those with whom we most agree on various details of the Scriptures? Do we truly love those whose imperfections may be a trial *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) to us? That is, do we love them sufficiently not to speak evil about them, or to make them the subjects of gossip when fellowshipping with those whose personalities are more congenial to us?

Do we love those of our brethren who are going through severe trials and need our help and encouragement, and do we show it by our actions? Do we love those who may be tossed about by various winds of doctrine, and seek, in humility, to assist them to have their feet set upon the sure foundation of Truth? Do we love those who may not yet have learned much in the way of Truth, but have expressed interest in understanding more? Do we love them so ardently that we are willing to lay down our lives bearing witness to the Truth in order that they may hear and be blessed by it?

John continues his thoughts concerning love with these words, "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:18) If, upon examining ourselves, we find that we have a pervasive, all-encompassing love for all of our brethren—a love that will cause us to lay down our lives for them if called upon to do so—then we have this further assurance of divine favor, and the encouraging testimony that as sons of God we have "passed from death unto life." Indeed, one of the final and most searching tests, and one that we must not fail, is that of developing selfless and sacrificial love for our brethren. Let us endeavor to qualify under its conditions. It is a witness that human philosophy cannot overthrow, nor that Satan's lies can destroy.

BURNING AND SHINING LIGHTS

Jesus spoke of John the Baptist, his forerunner, as “a burning and shining light.” (John 5:35) We may be sure that Jesus also befits this forceful description. Some lights may appear to be cold, harsh, or unsympathetic, but the kind of light which is approved of God is that which is beautifully described in these words of the Master, and which he exemplified continually. His was a “burning” light—warm, glowing, sympathetic, helpful, intensive and all illuminating. He was the Light which came down from heaven—undimmed, lovely, shining forth to the fullest the light of divine truth. The Apostle John wrote concerning Jesus that he was the “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. ... In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”—John 1:9,4

One of the charges brought against Jesus by the Pharisees and scribes was, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” (Luke 15:2) As the Jewish religious leaders heard of these things, they began to realize that Jesus’ conduct of life was of a different sort than theirs, and as darkness hates the light, they hated him. (John 3:19,20) The common people, though, heard him gladly. (Mark 12:37) Recognizing that he was different from the others, they were drawn to Jesus because he was a “burning and shining light,” and they marveled at the “gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.”—Luke 4:22

Those in this present Gospel Age who have made a consecration of their lives to God and are anxious to know the divine will that they may conform their lives to it, have entered into the school of Christ. They desire to be taught of him, and then

to apply the things learned to faithfully walk in his footsteps. (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23) As sincere students of the Bible, they seek to know the secrets of the Lord and understand them more fully, because they love him supremely, and appreciate his glorious plans and purposes.—Matt. 11:25; I Cor. 2:10-12

Concerning our privileges of also being light-bearers, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) As the Bible is the “lamp” provided by God to all those who walk in his Son’s footsteps, so each of us in turn is a lamp which should shine forth to others, fueled by the symbolic anointing oil of the Holy Spirit. (Ps. 119:105; Phil. 2:15) As sympathetic and helpful lights in the midst of a dark world, we have this admonition from the Apostle Peter, “That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

“THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS”

While keeping our lamps properly trimmed and burning, and while seeking to glorify God as burning and shining lights in the world, we have the assurance that we will not be successful at this present time in converting the world. Concerning Jesus, John said, “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”—John 1:5

The Master’s words concerning his followers continues to be true even as we near the end of this present age. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” “Ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” (I John 3:13, John 15:18) The reason

for this is that it is only the church, not the world in general, which is being tested and tried at this time. The world of mankind will have the opportunity in the coming Messianic kingdom to be taught of God and to learn of his ways. For the Christian now, however, the opposition and darkness of the world serves to test our loyalty to God and to the Truth revealed in his Word, by which we are also to be sanctified.—John 17:17

Whoever receives, understands, and appreciates the light of truth must rejoice in it, and let it shine forth to others. “Put on therefore, as God’s elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, ... and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.” (Col. 3:12-14, *Revised Version*) The Lord is seeking these qualities among those whom he has invited to be sharers in the glories of the kingdom for which we have so long prayed.—Matt. 6:10

In God’s kingdom, soon to be established, Christ and his bride, the church, will constitute the great “Sun of righteousness,” which will “arise with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) Mankind themselves will have the privilege of being lights one to another, as each one learns, and puts into practice, the righteous precepts and principles of God’s law of love. Let us, therefore, be obedient and strive daily to make our “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) If faithful, the “better things” related to our calling will result in the realization of our hope of “glory and honour and immortality, eternal life,” as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”—Rom. 2:7; 8:17 ■