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## **A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION**

He came to us; and He need not have come. He had the whole creation of angelic realms in which to find satisfaction if He wished, countless multitudes of sinless angelic beings to do Him homage and with whom He could have fellowship; but He left them behind. This earth was a dark place, dark with sin and wretchedness, its inhabitants violent, lustful, cruel; and they hated Him. Yet He came.

*“His Father’s house of light,  
His glory-circled throne,  
He left, for earthly night,  
For wanderings sad and lone.  
He left it all for me-  
Have I left aught for Thee?”*

That was why He came. He came for me, that I might be delivered from this dark abyss of sin, and rejoice in the glorious liberty of the children of God. He came for my fellows, too, that they might be rescued in like fashion. He came to establish the Father’s Kingdom here on earth, that Kingdom which is already supreme in every other sphere of the Father’s creation. He came to afford all a full, fair, free opportunity of eternal life.

*“He breaks the power of reigning sin  
And sets the prisoner free.  
His blood can make the foulest clean;  
His blood avails for me.”*

He came because He was the only one who could possibly come. He is the greatest in all creation and only the greatest can make the greatest sacrifice. And His sacrifice was the greatest. No creature in all heaven and all earth will ever be able to make so great a sacrifice. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich.

*“Man of sorrows! What a name  
For the son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim!  
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!”*

He came to tell men of His plans for their future happiness, how that even their killing of Him will not frustrate His hold over them. For He comes again to bring them all to Himself, as many as have not utterly extinguished their own capacity for repentance. And as assurance of that restoration, He has left His followers behind to go on telling of the glorious

Kingdom which will follow earth’s dark night of sin, a Kingdom in which mankind will be drawn by every artifice in God’s armoury to repentance and reconciliation with Him, walking along the way of holiness to full acceptance of salvation in Christ. For unto Him will every knee on earth bow, as now does every knee in heaven.

*“One offer of salvation  
To all the world make known.  
‘Tis Jesus Christ, the First and Last;  
He saves, and He alone.”*

He came, and He comes again. Not now as a babe in a manger, but a glorious heavenly Lord, armed with all power in heaven and in earth. He comes to gather His Church to be with Him, and only those who are watching for His appearing will share in that gathering. He comes revealed in the consuming fire of Divine judgment for the destruction of all those institutions of men which stand in the way of His incoming Kingdom. He comes in

resplendent glory so that all may know that He has come, and at once begins to speak peace to the nations.

*“Down the minster aisles of splendour, from between the cherubim,  
Through the wondering throng, with motion strong and fleet.  
Sounds His victor tread approaching, with a music far and dim,  
The music of the coming of His feet,  
He is coming, O my spirit, with His everlasting peace,  
With His blessedness, immortal and complete.  
He is coming, O my spirit, and His coming brings release.  
I listen for the coming of His feet.”*

The angels are singing in the distance; there are just a few who can hear their song to-day. Later on all will hear them and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, obtaining joy and gladness while sorrow and sighing flee away.

*“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.  
(B.S.M.)*

## “FOLLOW AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS”

As year by year we press on in the narrow way, ...trusting in our loving Father and in His dear son, our Saviour, it is good to call to mind the advice given so long ago by the aged apostle Paul to his beloved son in the faith, Timothy. In his two letters, the long experienced warrior in the faith was seeking to reassure, to encourage and to stimulate his younger disciple to carry on the ministry of the gospel, for which he himself had so long laboured. His words were addressed to a relatively young man but they come down the years to us all of every age.

The apostle deals in his two letters to Timothy with the various features of God’s plan and the manner in which that young man should seek to express them in his own life and ministry. The second letter, in particular, might be termed Paul’s “goodbye letter” for he states clearly in it that the end for him is near. So to this young man, with whom he had formed such a firm and close relationship and whom he addressed in such affectionate terms, he confides, as it were, his closing thoughts, including among other things the rather plaintive plea for Timothy, if it were possible, to pay him one last visit in prison.

### A CALL TO MINISTRY

Timothy was quite young, probably in his teens, when Paul first visited Lystra in Asia Minor, estimated to be in about AD 45. Timothy was of mixed parentage, his father being a Greek and his mother a Jewess. He was evidently brought up in the Jewish faith and when Paul came to Lystra with the good news of Jesus, Tim other, Lois, quickly responded and declared themselves for Him. Apparently, a local church was established there and in it Timothy grew up in knowledge and grace.

Paul again visited the town about six years later and it is recorded in Acts 16:1-3- *“Then came he (Paul) to Derbe and Lystra, and behold a certain disciple was there named Timotheus, Who was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with us.”* So this association, which followed the departure of Barnabas, Paul’s previous co-labourer, was formed and extended for a number of years of joint activity in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear that, during this time, a strong bond of loyalty and affection was forged between the older and younger servant of Jesus Christ.

In his letters to Timothy, we see something of the inner character of the aged apostle, we see the more tender, solicitous side of the grand old fighter for the truth, “Mr Valiant for Truth”, as Bunyan calls one of his characters, and the great codifier of the Christian gospel in all its facets. We can detect in them a growing weariness from all his exertions, and no doubt his imprisonments, and his readiness to lie at rest in the Lord. We see also into the character and background of the younger man. It seems possible that, apart from his youthfulness, he may have been by nature hesitant or timid, and Paul had to urge him to carry on the ministry fearlessly. *“Let no one despise your youth, rather be an example to the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (1 Tim 4:12)*

So then, to assist the younger man, Paul out of the wisdom gained over the years, counsels Timothy and his words come down to us today, not only to the younger brothers and sisters, though especially to them, but to all who would live for Christ. We might consider his words of instruction, counsel and encouragement under three headings -

- (1) the foundation of faith
- (2) the call to follow after righteousness

(3) the reward of righteousness

## THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

For all God's people, faith must be founded upon the Word of God, the recorded word centred on Him who is the Living Word. Paul tells us in Rom 10:14-17- *"How shall they call on Him (the Lord Jesus) in whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things <sup>L</sup>So then, faith come by hearing and hearing by the word of God."* In his second letter, Paul urges on Timothy to "preach the word", not logic or philosophy or worldly wisdom, but the Word of God.

For this task, Timothy had the advantage of a godly mother and grandmother, whose faith the apostle commends. Through them, the young man had *'from a child known the holy scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus.'* (2 Tim 3:15) This grounding in the Old Testament scriptures would have been for these "Israelites indeed" a wonderful basis for the preaching of the apostle when he reached their town in the course of his missionary journeys, for these all point forward to the One, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself the living Word of God, and who is the only foundation on which faith and character can be built.

As already noted, all evidently readily embraced the new Christian faith. Perhaps, like Simeon of whom Luke tell us, they were also "waiting for the consolation of Israel" or, like Anna, the prophetess, "were looking for redemption in Israel." So it was in due time that Paul called Timothy, the young man blessed with an hereditary faith and knowledge of the scriptures, but more importantly with a personal faith and conviction, to the ministry of the word of God, assuring him that - *"all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* (2 Tim 3:16,17)

Into the ministry of the gospel, the young man may well have entered with some misgivings. He was following in the steps of a very gifted and seasoned campaigner. So the apostle deems it necessary to stir up his zeal, strengthen his resolve, and point him in the right way of service. Among many particular instructions, three which are grouped together seem to embrace the various aspects of his personal life and ministry. We might refer to them as the three F's, and they are found in 1 Tim 6:11,12 - *"But thou, O man of God, FLEE these things (worldly pursuits previously listed), and FOLLOW after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness: FIGHT the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."* In 2 Tim 2:22, he counsels Timothy on similar lines to *"flee also youthful lusts but follow after righteousness."*

### "FLEE THESE THINGS"

Whether we come into the faith in our youth, like Timothy, or in later life, all the lessons of the apostle to his young co-worker need to be learnt and put into practice. To flee youthful lusts might seem an unnecessary instruction to those of maturer years or, like Timothy, from a godly home, but there are many distractions, often harmless enough in themselves, to draw the new believer away. Lusts conjure up the thought of evils but the word can also mean desires, and for all believers there are self-denials and sacrifices which will have to be made if they are to be fully true to their Master. Paul himself gave up very much in status and prospects, but these so-called gains he was ready to count as loss and worthless in comparison with the riches of God's grace, the privileges of present service and the joy of future blessings.

Our Heavenly Father desires mature, well-developed sons and daughters. In the Christian way, we can only go forward or slip back; there is no standing still. Paul had to tell the Hebrew brethren - *"leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection."* (Heb 6:1) The thought here is of going onward towards completion of Christian understanding and character, of being progressively developed and changed more and more into the likeness of our perfect Master, fully sanctified, fully cleansed and set apart for His service. Paul had in fact to rebuke some of the Hebrew brethren for failure to progress; instead of being able to assimilate the "strong meat" of the word and to instruct others, they were still on the "milk of the word", suitable for infants.

*"Every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. Strong meat belongs to those who are of full age, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* (Heb 5:11-14) Behind his words is the responsibility of all who have been blessed by the word of God to daily feast upon His word, to seek more and more to learn well His will for them, to put that will into practice and in turn to be a blessing to others. *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever, Amen."* (2 Pet 3:18) *"Speaking the truth in love, grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ."* (Eph 4:15)

## THE CALL TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

At the beginning of his counsel to Timothy in 1 Tim 6:11,12, the apostle addresses him in these words - "Thou, O man of God". Here he does not use the more affectionate, familiar terms of endearment elsewhere employed, such as "my own son in the faith", "dearly beloved son", and so on, but addresses him as "man of God." This is surely an arresting title. It has been pointed out that its use in the Old Testament is not uncommon, being used particularly of Moses, of the prophets and of David. The expression is nowhere else used in the New Testament, except in a general sense in 2 Tim 3:17, where, as already noted, the inspired scriptures are the all-in-all provision for each man or woman of God. In our verse in 1 Tim 6, the apostle is surely setting a very high standard and stern challenge before Timothy to be "God's man". The challenge to us is to be "men and women of God."

All who are begotten of God's Holy Spirit are His children, and in 2 Cor 6:17, 18 we read - "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you and be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*" This is a blessed relationship, but the mode of address of the apostle in our verse would seem to present a greater challenge, to be all for Him who called Timothy and who has called us to be followers of His dear Son. "*Watch you, stand fast in the faith, acquit yourselves like men, be strong!*" (1 Cor 16:13) Here the same apostle directs a similar challenge to the faithful brethren in Corinth as to young Timothy, who had evidently already begun well and was to go on to be God's man of valour, like his older mentor.

This required active pursuit of righteousness; the verbs of challenge used here and in the previous verse are stated to be very emphatic. Flee right away from all unworthy, worldly things as far and as fast as possible. Pursue eagerly and constantly what is right and just and pleasing in God's sight, and in keeping with His character, deal gently with those around us. With this, the apostle links godliness, the devotion of the heart and will to that which is pleasing to God. Furthermore, Timothy's preaching and doctrine was to be according to godliness, that is, it was to be consistent with the divine character, harmonious with and productive of godliness.

Our Lord made it clear that such pursuit of righteousness, of right dealings with God and mankind, will bring opposition, will result in trials, but His promise stands sure - "*Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt 5:10) and again - "*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" (Matt 5:6) Such an earnest longing will provide the stimulus to those who are called to pursue righteousness and the other gracious qualities listed by the apostle here and throughout his letters to Timothy.

In 1 Tim 6:11, Paul adds to righteousness and godliness, the heart's desire for full communion and harmony with God, first what we might consider the active qualities of faith or faithfulness and of love, and second the submissive qualities of patient endurance and meekness. In his second letter, he adds the qualities or graces of faith, love and peace out of a pure heart. (2 Tim 2:22) The exercise of all these can however only follow full acceptance of the divine righteousness and the inner development of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which encompass all these traits of character.

## **THE NATURE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

We read that God is love, but also that "righteousness and judgement" are the habitation of His throne. (Psa 97:2) Of our Saviour, it was foretold - "*Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness, therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*" (Psa 45:7 quoted in Heb 1:9) To be pleasing in any way to God, to be eligible for any service for Him, not only Timothy, but young men and women of all ages must be lovers of righteousness, of the perfect wisdom, justice, love and power of our Heavenly Father as exhibited in our Saviour and in that grand plan of salvation which He has centred in Him.

How then would we define righteousness in our present context? The word is used in scripture in more than one sense, but in each case it carries the thought of rightness, exactness, complete justice. In 1 Cor 1:30, we read that Christ is made unto us righteousness, referring to our standing before God, justified by faith in Him. In our present portion, it is the righteous character of God as set before the believer, the pursuit of which will entail the development of a like character. Vine describes righteousness as primarily "the character or quality of being right or just", first of all an attribute of God. Perhaps for one definition of it, we might consider Phil 4:8 as descriptive of its various aspects - truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, good report, virtue, praiseworthiness.

In our day, righteousness even by past worldly standards is conspicuously rare. Our daily news testifies to the moral corruptness of many in high places, people whom we once would have expected to look up to. For all too many now "the end justifies the means", including compromise, dishonesty, etc. This is an infectious disease and immunisation with the spirit of God's righteousness is the only complete and effective antidote. "All unrighteousness is sin" is the clear and unequivocal standard of scripture, with the injunction, "abstain from all appearance of evil."

Just as peace is not just the absence of strife, but an active force in its own right, so righteousness is not just

an absence of iniquity and injustice, but a positive longing for and practice of what is right in God's sight at all times. This cannot be in our own strength, for we know how the scriptures describe our righteousness, but in the daily strength which our Heavenly Father will supply, if we ask in faith. The pursuit and the practice go together, as the apostle John tells us - "*Little children, let no one deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He (Jesus) is righteous.*" (1 John 3:7) We need to be both hearers and doers.

## **THE PREACHING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The practice of righteousness in Timothy's own life was further to be manifested in his preaching. Here was a relatively young man, well versed in the Hebrew scriptures and well tutored by Paul, but commissioned to preach to many who would no doubt be his elders, possibly inclined to be contemptuous of him. So the apostle instructs him - "*Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*" (2 Tim 4:2) What is the basis for such preaching? As already seen, there can be one foundation only for Christian service, namely the holy scriptures, scriptures given by divine inspiration and fully sufficient for the equipping of every servant of God, whatever the area of ministry of that brother and sister in Christ may be.

In our time, we are blessed not only with the wonderful messages of the Old Testament prophets and others who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, but with the record of much of our Saviour's public and private teaching and the messages given through His faithful apostles and others. These alone must be the basis of our preaching, as for Timothy. For many of the precious truths we cherish, there is a clear "thus saith the Lord", and these are the great fundamentals of our faith. To these, we can add those understandings which seem to flow clearly and inevitably from the great library of scripture. But there are other areas where, to be honest, we cannot be dogmatic and need to be wary of building too much upon them.

Perhaps as a guide to Timothy's preaching, Paul in his first letter sets out a brief but very comprehensive resume of the whole plan of God, not only for His people now but reaching forward to all mankind in due time. This would no doubt be a basis for the younger man's witness and preaching, as it has particularly and justifiably been for Bible students. "*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*" (1 Tim 2:3-6)

But as well as the pursuit and practice of righteousness, the scriptures speak also of the reward or prize of righteousness. We shall return to this later, but we are assured that it is within the giving of a righteous judge, and that, in the meantime, to cover our shortcomings, we have an "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." (1 John 2:1) The psalmist was led to write - "*Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous, for praise is comely for the upright.*" (Psa 33:1) Those whom God has justified by faith, reckoned righteous in His sight, are assured of His constant care. "*The Lord is near unto them that are of a broken heart.... many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth out of them all.*" (Psa 34:18,19)

## **"FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH"**

Having urged the younger man, Timothy, to flee worldly ambitions and desires and to follow diligently in the way of righteousness and godliness, he proceeds to challenge him to take up the good fight of faith and to lay hold on eternal life. The word for fight used here can apparently refer to the fight of battle or the fight of the arena; in either case a foe has to be overcome and similar preparation, discipline and diligence are all important. The weapons of our warfare, as itemised by the same apostle in Eph 6, indicate a very real and crucial combat, including the onslaughts of the great enemy of God's people, the opponent of all righteousness.

But why would Paul call it a good fight? There is an account of a Greek general of earlier time, who is reputed to have urged on his troops by telling them in rather similar terms - "We fight for something that is worth fighting for. That makes it a good fight." In somewhat similar vein, the apostle himself, using this time the analogy of a foot race, declares - "*Know ye not that they who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize. So run, that ye may obtain. And everyone who striveth for the mastery is temperate (uses self-control) in all things. They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we are incorruptible.*" (1 Cor 9:24, 25)

The Christian warfare, the combat, is one of faith, requiring full trust and surrender to the will of our Father, of whom it is declared "*Faithful is He who has called you, who also will do it.*" (1 Thess 5:24) It requires daily faithfulness in the path and in the tasks set before us, for we all are stewards of His grace, stewards of whom it is required that they be found faithful. The old Testament heroes of faith, the cloud of witnesses, challenge us to emulate their fidelity. Above all, we have in our Saviour the perfect example of faithfulness and as we follow in his steps, we too seek to lay hold on eternal life, even as He was faithful unto death and is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

## **THE REWARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Nearly the last words of the apostle in his farewell letter to Timothy are very moving, as he confides to his

younger colleague - *"I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."* (2 Tim 4:6-8) He had earlier foreshadowed this in his letter to the Philippians - *"having a desire to depart and to be with Christ"* (Phil 1:23) - but it was not then the time. Now he is ready to depart, to be at rest in the Lord, to await "that day" when he would receive the crown of righteousness.

How glad we can be that the apostle did not stop at that point. No, he adds for Timothy's benefit and encouragement, and for ours - *"And not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing!"* What a glorious day that will be for those who win the great victory of faith! *"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith,"* writes the apostle John. For Timothy, for all whom God has called and who by faith and obedience to the will of God make their calling and election sure, there is a crown of righteousness laid up in heaven. So may the beloved apostle's words challenge us to even greater faithfulness as each year passes. Let us hear his final words to his son in the faith, Timothy "man of God" - *"The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen."*

## **Sacrifices of Thanksgiving**

*"By Him therefore 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)

There is no better way, in fact there is no other way at all, to live a true life of thanksgiving and praise to God than to lay down our lives in showing forth His praises. When we consider that all we have and all we hope for are ours by God's grace, then we well know that our debt of gratitude calls for nothing less than the devotion of our all to Him, no longer living unto ourselves, nor for ourselves, but for Him.

It is this thought that is expressed by David in those well known words - *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Thy servant.... and the son of Thine handmaid. Thou has loosed my bonds, I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people."* (Psalm 116:12-18)

Again the Psalmist calls upon us to remember the Lord's goodness with thanksgiving, saying, *"Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing."* (Psalm 107: 21,22) How clearly does David here, as elsewhere, associate thanksgiving with declaring the works of the Lord! This is a very practical arrangement. If we had received special favours from an earthly friend and wanted to show our appreciation by letting others know of his goodness, there would be no better way to do it than to tell of his actions, of what he did for us.

How wonderfully the Lord has favoured us! What rich blessings He has bestowed upon us! How grand are the promises He has yet to carry out for us, and not only for us, but also for the whole world! To tell of all His works it is necessary to publish the truth of His plan. Thus it is that in appreciation of what God has done for us, because His love calls forth our love in return, His people became the light of the world, "a city that is set on a hill (which) cannot be hid." (Matt. 5:14)

As we count our many blessings we should not overlook trials which the Heavenly Father has permitted to come into our lives. If we had the choosing of our own experiences we would avoid the things which annoy, and vex, and try us, but God, in His great wisdom, sees that we need trials and in His love permits them. If our wills are wholly resigned to Him, then we will be thankful that He is providing all our needs, even ordeals that are so necessary for the rounding out of our Christian characters.

Some of our trials may be permitted by God to test our faith and confidence in Him. Others are to develop our patience and long-suffering. At times these may be in the nature of chastening from the Lord. In any case, they are permitted by our Heavenly Father who is too wise to err, and too loving to be unkind. Even though He may discipline us, it is in love, and our hearts should respond in grateful appreciation for this evidence that He is not withholding necessary experiences.

### **"IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS"**

**In** these words, the Apostle Paul exhorts us in 1 Thess. 5:18. None but truth-enlightened, fully consecrated Christians can do this wholeheartedly. These know that nothing can come into their lives except that which is for their good. (Rom. 8:28) They know that they are the children of a loving Heavenly Father who is watching over their every interest. They have the assurance that even the most minute affairs of their lives, illustrated by the hairs of their head, are known by Him, and directed according to His wisdom and love. (Matt. 10:30)

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” -this is a promise which every Christian should apply personally, and should believe with all his or her heart. (Psalm 37:23) If we are truly thankful for the manner in which the Lord is guiding our lives then we will not try to resist or go contrary to His will. Instead, with a prayer in our hearts and a song on our lips, we will continue to pay our vows unto Him, keeping our sacrifice on the altar until it is wholly consumed.

“He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”, said Job (Job 23:10) God also knows the way we take, and He is trying us as gold is tried. This means that He puts us through the fires of affliction so that the gold of our character might be refined. But how precious is the thought that the Great Refiner tempers the heat. He will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. If He sees that the heat is becoming so intense that we are apt to be injured, He provides a way of escape. (1 Cor. 10:13) Yes, He knows and He cares! (1 Peter 5:7) May this blessed truth become so thoroughly fixed in our minds and hearts that nothing will be able to disturb our inner peace and rest in Him and His promises!

We have been blessed with the light of the knowledge of God. His “wondrous works”, the glorious doctrines of the Divine plan, have enlightened us. We have a hope for the world and for ourselves. We have the assurance of Divine care, of Divine forgiveness, of Divine help, and of Divine discipline. All of these evidences convince us of Divine love. Yes, we know that He cares, and that “no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11) We enjoy this knowledge, because “God is the Lord, who hath shown us light.” Shall we not then respond with thanksgiving, making melody in our hearts unto the Lord and sounding forth His praises throughout the land? Let us thus offer the sacrifice of praise continually, and let us “bind the sacrifice with cords even unto the horns of the altar.” (Psalm 118:27) (Dawn)

## **“LORD INCREASE OUR FAITH”**

*(LUKE 17:5-19)*

Our Lord’s teachings were contrary to the spirit of this world, and so adverse to its policy that His disciples felt that to adopt His methods and principles and discard their own really involved a revolution of their former ideas. In yielding themselves as true disciples, they felt the need of a stronger, firmer faith than they had yet been called upon to exercise.

They were quite persuaded from the purity and nobility of His character and from His miracles and His teachings, that he was indeed a teacher sent from God; yet, remembering the requirement of discipleship, “Whoso forsaketh not all that he hath (all his own ideals and will and possessions and earthly prospects), he cannot be My disciple.” they felt that to continue in this attitude of acceptable discipleship would require a growing faith which would rise to every emergency of His requirements. Hence their request, “Lord, increase our faith.”

They were quite right in their reasoning; for the Lord also clearly shows that true disciples make progress in the school of Christ toward the full overcoming of the spirit of the world. This progress can be achieved by faith only - by such full, implicit confidence in His teachings and training as will keep them continually as earnest, diligent pupils under His guidance and instruction. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). This is very suggestive of what it signifies to be an “overcomer,” to whom pertains all the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel of Christ.

It is simply this: That day by day we attentively heed and patiently carry out the instructions of our infallible Teacher and Guide in full, unquestioning faith in His wisdom and love; no matter how heavy will be the daily cross or how severe the discipline. It is indeed a tedious, life-long process, but the end will be glorious, and even the daily discipline, patiently and meekly borne, will bring the present rewards of conscious prowess in the great work of overcoming and of a nearer approach to the goal of a ripened Christian character. All of this is implied in the beautiful words, so expressive of the faith and fervent devotion of true discipleship -

“Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee, E’en though it be a cross that raiseth me.”

The Lord made no direct answer to this request of His disciples, but dwelt upon the power and desirability of faith, and His whole subsequent course with the disciples was a fulfilment of it. So it will be with us if, in a similarly true spirit of discipleship, we pray, “Lord, increase our faith.” The increase of faith will come, not by a miraculous infusion, but in the natural process of the Lord’s leading and training. In the school of experience, in following His leadings, and in the blessed results of each step of the way, faith develops and grows.

Verses 7 - 10 show that it is in the Lord’s service we are to look for the rewards of faith, the special manifestations of Divine favour, in the removal of obstacles and difficulties, found to be in the way of our progress in His service by cultivating Christian character in ourselves and others, and in ministering generally to the furtherance of the Divine plans. We may not expect these rewards of Divine favour, except as we carry out the service, and when they are received we are not to regard them as evidences that we have done any more

than it was our duty to do.

As servants of God we owe Him the full measure of our ability; hence *we* may not feel that we have merited or earned the great blessings of heavenly inheritance and joint-heirship with Christ. We have merely done our duty; but God, with exceeding riches of grace has prepared, for those who lovingly serve Him, rewards far beyond what they could have asked or hoped for. We can do no meritorious works; even at our best our service is marred by many imperfections, and could never find acceptance with God; except as supplemented by the perfect and finished work of Christ.

Verses 11 - 16 show how the rewards of faith, which are of God's free grace, and by no means earned by our faith, should be gratefully received. The examples given illustrate the fact that the rewards of faith are not always gratefully received. Here were ten lepers cleansed, and only one returned to give thanks and worship. So also of the many who receive justification by faith, the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God through Christ, how few return to present themselves living sacrifices, thank-offerings, to God, their reasonable service. (R1967)

### **THE GOOD THAT I CAN DO**

I live for those who love me  
Whose hearts are kind and true;  
For the heaven that smiles above me  
To rejoice my spirit too.  
For the precious ties that bind me,  
For the task by God assigned me,  
For others still behind me,  
And the good that I can do.

### **THE SEPARATED LIFE**

As long as the Church remain amid earthly environments and more or less subject to the enticements presented by the "the world, the flesh and the devil", they will find it necessary to keep fresh in mind the real facts of the **separated life** God expects of His people. They will also find it necessary to be frequently reminded that it is an important part of Christian experience to spend and be spent in the service of God.

Inasmuch as the New Testament abounds in references to self-effacing sacrifice as a feature of our privilege in imitating Christ, let us give consideration to some of these, turning first to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John; "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John 15:9-13, 13:14,15)

### **THE TRUE NATURE OF LOVE**

In these several texts, Jesus distinctly tells us to imitate Him - "do as I have done unto you." Here He teaches us that there will be need to be a laying aside of all feelings of superiority in our approach to our brethren. He gives no encouragement to anyone to note the soiled feet of others and then in self-congratulation take the position that one's own are not soiled, and become occupied in parading the infirmities of others, some of which may be real enough to be seen, and some perhaps wholly imaginary. It is the true nature of love to "cover a multitude of sins." It is the spirit of true sacrificial love to believe that we would find better than we thought, if we only understood.

The noblest trait of Christian character springing out of loving God with all the heart is that of loving one's neighbour as oneself. Will not such love abounding in one's heart be manifested in esteeming others better than ourselves? Will it not lead us to minimise the defects, and "if there be any virtue, any praise, any good report" to magnify these? With this love, which is the love of God and of Christ, really abounding in our hearts, will it not be easier to make all needed provision and allowance for diversities, which in the very nature of things will be found among believers as long as the Church is in the flesh? Surely so!

We know full well why God's word makes love for the brethren so vital a matter, and makes our spiritual sonship dependant on our love for them. He has told us why by pointing us to the Son in whom He was well pleased. That Son pleased not Himself. He came to reveal the love of God to sinful, selfish mankind. He came

to completely separate His own from the world and its spirit by implanting love for righteousness and hatred for sin in their hearts, and He came to unite in a compact and heavenly unity the Church which He redeemed, unifying them not by creeds and rituals but by the cord of the love wherewith He loved them. Love of self must necessarily be eradicated from the heart before this feature of sacrificial love will hold sway there.

### **UNITED IN LOVE**

Between the saints who shared the experiences of the day of Pentecost and those now awaiting the completion of the Church, there have been many differences of character, of experience, of knowledge, and of service, but in heart the saints have been, and the saints still are, one in faith, because there has been faith in the one Lord. They have one hope, because they are waiting for the same consummation - "that blessed hope." They have been one in love, when the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts - blessed indeed is that tie that binds.

When believers are all seeking to grow in their love for the Lord, each heart absorbed by the greatness of the love and mercy by which salvation and sonship has come to them personally, they can be, praise God, united to one another in a bond of benevolent love which the influences of the present time of shaking will not disturb, and which eternity will wonderfully enlarge and confirm. The highest blessing of heaven will therefore rest on each one who has laboured by word and deed to foster the spirit of loving consideration for others, and who has by life and conduct striven to remove barriers between brethren, by bringing them together in the bonds of Christ's love.

Barriers that will grow higher and higher whatever other remedy for discord may be tried will melt away before the warmth of the love of God shed abroad in a truly sanctified, loving, benevolent Christian heart. If we want to have a place in the heart of God, the way thereto lies directly through the heart of the beloved Son of God. That heart knew no selfishness, no enmity, but was full to overflowing with love to God and mankind. O that we may in a fuller and greater measure be known as "imitators of God, as dear children", and walk in love even as the Anointed One loved us. (The Herald)

*I would not seek in earthly bliss to find a rest apart from Thee, Forgetful of Thy sacrifice, which purchased life and peace for me."*