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THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." 1 Peter 1:8

The Word of God has much to say in both the 1 Old and New Testaments on the subject of Joy and Rejoicing, such as -

Psalm 100:2 *"Serve the Lord with gladness."* 1 Thess. 5:16 *"Rejoice evermore."*

It is, indeed, only those like our Saviour whose delight and joy is to do the Father's will who can be pleasing in His sight.

Moses was directed by the Lord to instruct the children of Israel to render their services to Him with joy and rejoicing of heart. (Deut. 12:7, 16:14, 15, etc.) In fact, punishments came upon them if they failed to serve the Lord with joy (Deut. 28:45-47), showing how important this matter was, and is, in the Lord's sight. The psalms also give great prominence to the matter of joy and rejoicing -

Psalm 5:11 *"Let all those who put their trust in Thee rejoice; let them shout for joy."*

Psalm 16:11 *"In Thy presence is fulness of Joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."*

Psalm 35:9 *"My soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in His salvation."*

Many other references to the value of cultivating the joyful spirit are to be found in the Old Testament; two examples may suffice -

Isaiah 29:19 *"The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."*

Neh. 8:10 *"This day is holy unto our Lord, neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

In the New Testament, we find that the Lord and His apostles have much to say on the subject of Christian rejoicing. Paul's words in Phil. 4:4 surely represent the very essence of Christian living- *"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"* Under present conditions, it is not to be expected that outward circumstances will always be favourable to rejoicing, from a natural viewpoint. Those, therefore, who would always rejoice in the Lord must have faith in Him - trust, hope, love.

Without these, we could not so appropriate to ourselves the gracious promises of the Word as to be able to rejoice in tribulation and suffering, in trials and difficulties, when falsely accused or misrepresented, when slandered or evilly spoken of, for the truth's sake. Those only can rejoice always who are living near to the Lord, who can feel at all times their oneness with Him, who know that His protection and care are over them and His promise is sure that all things shall work together for their highest welfare as new creatures.

Others may rejoice today and be cast down tomorrow; only the faithful in Christ Jesus are privileged to rejoice always. The realisation of the Lord's favours, past, present and still to come, make all the trials and difficulties appear very light afflictions, lasting but for a moment, and not worthy to be compared with the glory, honour and immortality promised, and the blessed privileges of divine service, both here and hereafter. The apostle emphasises his exhortation by saying - *"Again I say Rejoice!"* It has been said that we cannot have too many rejoicing Christians, nor can they rejoice too much, if they rejoice in the Lord. This rejoicing is not necessarily boisterous or the reverse, but it implies serenity, happiness, peace and pleasure of soul.

The apostle follows these words with the exhortation - *"Let your moderation be known unto all. The Lord is*

at hand.” Phil. 4:5. The faithful are to let their moderation, their forbearance, be manifested not only toward the brethren, but toward all with whom they have to do. The word here rendered “moderation” seems to carry the thought of reasonableness and of not exacting our own rights too rigorously. Mercy and leniency are certainly qualities required of all who would be members of the Body of the Anointed. We should strive to be faithful in the performance, as far as possible, of all that justice would require of us, and merciful in respect of all our requirements of justice from others. In this way, we shall be the children of our Father in heaven, who is kind to the merciful and to the unthankful.

The thought in his words - “The Lord is at hand” - seems to be that we who are the Lord’s are not living for the present time. We are expecting great changes to be ushered in when our King takes to Himself His great power and begins His reign. We are not to struggle for the last centimetre, or the last cent, nor for the extreme of our rights; but rather, to be so full of rejoicing in the good things coming and already ours by faith, that it will make us generous as regards the things of the present time in our dealings with the brethren and others.

Nothing that we have done or could do would justly call for such exceeding great and precious things as He has promised us. So as we are expecting grace or bounty from Him in so large measure, we can well afford to be generous and liberal in our sentiments toward others - especially the household of faith, because they are our brothers and sisters and fellow-representatives of the Lord Himself, from whom our bounty is to come. We can also be the same toward the world without, because they have not the future prospects which we possess, and we are so rich through our Heavenly Father and our Heavenly Bridegroom.

“Be careful for nothing” is the apostle’s next exhortation (Verse 6), but since our English word “careful” has lost its original meaning, there is a danger of taking a wrong thought here. The word formerly had the idea of being full of care, anxious, troubled. The apostle’s words correspond exactly with those of our Lord’s injunction - “Take no thought” - that is to signify - Do not be anxious, burdened, full of care. It is proper that the Lord’s people be careful, in the present meaning of the word - not careless, indifferent, loose in conduct or words, but circumspect.

Anxiety and burdens are unavoidable for those who are depending on themselves, their own wisdom, their own strength, their own skill; but the members of the Body of Christ, accepted in the Beloved, members in the divine family - children of God, are assured over and over again in the Word of God that, if they abide faithful, all things shall work together for their highest welfare. Why should they be burdened? Why should they feel anxious? He who guards their interests slumbers not.

When Christians find themselves anxious, fearful, burdened, the evidence is that they are lacking in faith, and the probability is that they have either never grown to the point of having proper faith in the Lord, or that they have allowed “earth-born clouds” and cares of this life to come between them and the Lord, so that they no longer have confidence that they are abiding in His love and care. All such should go at once to the throne of heavenly grace and to the divine promises, and, having obtained mercy and help, should grow in the Lord and in confidence in Him; their corroding cares will give place to faith, confidence, peace of heart, whatever the outward conditions.

Such is the counsel of the Apostle - that, instead of continuing in the anxious condition, we should lay all our affairs before the Lord, supplicating His promised providential care. Acknowledging our own lack of wisdom and gladly accepting His wisdom and the provisions of His love, we should make every request in a spirit of thanksgiving. This spirit recognises that the circumstances and conditions in which we are placed have been supervised of the Lord, that we are truly appreciative of His care, and trust it for the future. Thanksgiving for what we have, and a full appreciation of the Lord’s leadings hitherto and now, will preclude any anxiety for the future, for the thankful heart will conclude that He who favoured us and redeemed us while we were yet sinners, will much more favour and do for us now that we are His.

But we might ask - Why will God not give us the things which He sees we need without our making petition to Him and claiming the promises of His Word? Undoubtedly because we need first to come into the proper attitude of heart to receive His favours and be benefited by them. Even as it is, we may be sure that we do not sufficiently appreciate the divine care bestowed upon us hitherto and now. Even in the attitude of prayer and thanksgiving, we probably do not discern half of our causes for gratitude, as we shall later see them by and by, when we shall know even as we are known.

If we have the spirit of rejoicing and trust in the Lord, making all our requests, so far as we can discern in harmony with His promises, then accepting with gratitude whatever His providence may send, then - *“the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* It is not our own peace here referred to; we may by nature be not inclined to peace but restless, dissatisfied, discontented, fearful, but, following the Apostle’s counsel, we may learn to trust God in all our affairs. Then it is the peace of God, the peace which comes to us from a realisation of His power and goodness, and His willingness to hold us by His right hand as His children, that will be our portion to keep us from worry and anxiety.

The thought here is that this peace stands guard continually as a sentinel to challenge every hostile or worrying thought or fear. It keeps the Christian's heart, so that we have inward peace with the Lord, fellowship, communion. It guards the mind also, the reasoning faculties, instructing us concerning the divine power and wisdom and love. It does not assure us of anything respecting our own personal worthiness for acceptance before God, but His peace does assure us of our standing in divine favour through Christ Jesus and of His worthiness, His perfect sacrifice, His aid and strength.

In 1 Thess. 5:16-18, we read - "*Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*" A striking feature of the apostolic epistles is that a large portion of them is devoted to the unfolding of the future exalted station that God sets before the consecrated ones of this Gospel Age, but the remainder of the epistles is given over to a description of the effects that acceptance of the call to run in the race for that great prize should produce in the lives of such.

This is so in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Christians. It is well known that great truths may be taken into the head, may be intellectually discerned, and yet produce little or no effect in the life. In such cases, it is not the truths that are at fault, but those who imperfectly receive them. It is reasonable to conclude that, if these wonderful truths do not make a change in the everyday life of those claiming to receive them, then they have not yielded, or are not yielding up, their wills, all their ransomed power, to the One who purchased them with the pouring out of His life. "*Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body*" are the solemn words of the Apostle.

To know whether we are truly consecrated or not, it is absolutely necessary to be instructed not only about the high and heavenly calling itself, but also about the effects that, according to Scripture, reception of those blessed truths should have when taken into the heart and life. This first Thessalonian epistle has much to say about the "high calling of God in Christ Jesus" and the heavenly hope of the Christian. The words "rejoice evermore" are the first of seven exhortations which close the epistle and how helpful it is to the Christian to be in this condition of constant rejoicing.

In days of sunshine or of gloom, in life's bright scenes or life's dark scenes, in times of peace and quiet or of tribulation and distress, when the heart is uplifted or in mourning, in seasons of prosperity or adversity, it is always possible for the mature Christian to rejoice, to increase in prayer, to give thanks in everything. These characteristics describe those whose affections are centred on things above, who are closely united to God and who are thoroughly in earnest to please Him. They describe those who have a deep sense of their own unworthiness and deficiencies, and, more than this, a whole-hearted appreciation of the divine arrangements in Christ to make them acceptable, and to have fellowship and communion with the infinite God as a loving and kind Father.

In the words "rejoice evermore", we are reminded that true Christianity is not a gloomy thing nor a depressed state of existence. It is true that pure Christianity does have the effect of separating the believer from the evils of the world, and to a certain extent also from what may be termed legitimate worldly pleasures, pursuits and amusements. The thought is not, however, of the giving up of these things being depressing to Christians but rather that they have come into possession of higher enjoyments, pleasures that are eternal, enjoyments that have only their beginning in the present life and continue on in a fuller and richer measure.

Whatever Christians give up now, they suffer no loss of real pleasure that is not more than compensated for even in this life, in the enjoyment and blessings of a spiritual kind. Christians are not exempt from the trials and tribulations, adversities and perplexities, which flesh is heir to, but they have One who is with them in all these circumstances and conditions. The great ambition and purpose of their hearts is to give evidence by their lives that this One who is with them lifts them above these trials and adversities and enables them to bear all with patience and fortitude. They know that these earthly experiences that seem, from the natural standpoint, to work against them are being over-ruled for their development into the likeness of their Master.

They can see that these light afflictions, which are only for a moment, are working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Meanwhile, they look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal but the unseen are eternal. They can see that the seemingly adverse things are providential occasions for them to show what faith in the Lord can do for them, and so give a witness, a testimony, to God's favour and power in Christ. It has been truly said that even "the saddest aspects of a Christian's daily life are but the showers of spring that usher in the bright and beautiful summer - the everlasting and the heavenly sunshine."

To many, the Christian life may seem more like a penance than a life of fellowship with God. The word of God does not so describe it - rather it describes it as a blessed privilege. It is true that if it were not for the "blessed hope" beyond this vale of tears, the Christian would not be able to fulfil the exhortation to "rejoice evermore". The Christian life, therefore, cannot be separated from the hope of the life beyond. The more firmly this hope is laid hold of, the more it becomes a living reality, and the more the Christian can rejoice in

all conditions.

How beautifully the Apostle John describes this hope and the effect which a proper appreciation of it has on the Christian. *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.”* The hope that expresses not only desire, but confident expectation of its being realised in due time, enables the Christian to rejoice in tribulation, and even in bitter sorrow, to “joy in God”, knowing that all things are working together for his or her eternal good.

Hope is an element that to a greater or less extent exists in all, although to the children of the world, not understanding God’s love as revealed in His purposes for them, it does not reach beyond this present life. It does serve, however, to tide them over many of earth’s sorrows and trials. The poet has expressed it-

*Soft as the voice of an angel,
Breathing a message unheard;
Hope with a gentle persuasion,
Whispers the comforting word-
Wait till the darkness is over,
Wait till the tempest is done;
Hope for the sunshine tomorrow,
After the showers have gone.
Whispering hope,
O, how welcome thy voice,
Making my heart in its sorrow rejoice.*

The Christian life is not a reluctant sacrifice wrung from us, but a joyous, freewill offering, gladly and gratefully presented. Christians’ joy is not in the trials, difficulties and sorrows that they encounter, but in spite of them all, and in the midst of them all, they have a deep and abiding joy. This joy is in God, in the knowledge that they are in union with God through Christ, and they have been accepted by God in the Beloved. Their joy is enhanced as they recall that each is a branch in that heavenly vine that the Father is pruning that it may be more fruitful. *“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”* - our Saviour’s words in John 15:11, following the account of the vine and branches.

The Christian’s secret of a happy life is in knowing and always keeping in mind that they are children of God, that Christ is their Elder Brother, that their standing and acceptance are in Him, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is their Father, that it is not by works of righteousness which they have done, but by His own mercy, He saves them “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

Why is it the privilege of Christians to “rejoice evermore”? So far as we personally are concerned, Christians have much indeed in which to rejoice; we have nothing that need make us sad or rejected. God has forgiven all our past sins, in Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. We have a throne of grace which we may approach that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. We are by nature frail and weak, but we have a great High Priest who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities”. We have received of God’s own spirit, bearing witness that we are His children.

We have the blessed privilege of knowing that the great God and Creator is dealing with us as His sons and daughters. While He sees best at times to chasten us, we know that these chastenings are necessary and for our good, that we might become partakers of His holiness. We are made aware that there is a special providence over us, that all things work together for our good because we love God and are called according to His purpose. Jesus tells us that the Father loves us and that He Himself will love us to the end. Paul tells us that He who has begun a good work in us will complete it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Peter tells us that “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” are freely given to us by God.

If persecution comes to us because of our identification with Christ, or for His sake, He tells us to rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. We not only have the Spirit witnessing with ours that we are God’s children, but also that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him. We are no longer under condemnation, no longer subject to bondage, for *“we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father”* We have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. As our faith lays hold of these exceeding great and precious promises, we can rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

As for spiritual blessings, the greatest of all blessings, we are told that even now by faith we are raised up and privileged to sit with Christ in heavenly places. We have had made known to us by God the mystery of His will, according to the good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; that it His purpose in the dispensation of the fulness of times to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.

We have further the promise of Christ that He will come again and receive us unto Himself that where He is we may be also; that when He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. We have had made known to us God's wonderful plan of all ages - that all mankind are objects of His love, that He gave His Son to be a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, that our loved ones, who now do not see His love, in due time will be privileged to learn of it, and be offered an opportunity to obtain everlasting life; that there is a hope to be set before the world to attain to earthly glory in times of restitution of all things.

We are also assured that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "What more can He do for me?" - one might **ask** - "He has given me His word to guide me, His spirit to teach and comfort me, and the bright hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And as if to make me sure of all, He has said through the Apostle - "*All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*"

The Bible may not teach that the full assurance of faith is an absolute duty, but it does teach that it is a blessed possibility. There are indeed Christians who can truly say with the Apostle - "*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*" Others can say with the Psalmist - "*Whom I have in heaven but Thee? And there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*" It has been said - "Faith believes in Christ for salvation; assurance, which is a step higher, believes that in Christ we already have salvation. Both are saving. The first is saving only, the second is saving and comforting too." The Apostle John says - "*These things I write unto you, that your joy may be full*", that you may have a full assurance of joy.

The Christian's joy may be increased even beyond that fullness for we have something to give to others. If we wish to retain this assurance, we must give out liberally of that which we have received from God. We need to remember and practise the words of our Lord - "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" We do well to ponder also the lesson to be drawn from the incident of the four starving lepers recorded in 2 Kings 7:3-11. At the time there was a great famine; as lepers they had to live outside the city, but feeling no doubt they had nothing to lose they went in, only to find that the enemy host had all left, as a result of divine intervention, and so they proceeded to eat and drink their fill.

But later they began to talk amongst themselves - "*We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. If we tarry till morning light, some mischief will come upon us; now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household.*" Is there a lesson here for Christians? Are we not in a condition similar to that of the lepers? We have all been tainted with the leprosy of sin and in our needy and undone state we have been guided by the Lord's providence to a wonderful supply of food, Are we, as it were, hoarding the precious truth, keeping it to ourselves, or, as opportunity permits, passing the "good tidings" on?

If we wish to retain our full assurance of joy, we must give out freely of the good we have received. The Apostle Peter has said - "*Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.*" A writer comments on these words thus - "The very object of our being called into this light is that we may let it shine. If we do not let it shine, we are unworthy of it, and the treasure will be taken away and we will be left in the darkness. If indeed we have received the light and have consecrated ourselves fully to God, let us ask ourselves - "What am I doing to show forth the praises of Him who has called me out of darkness? Can I truly affirm that I am - "All for Jesus, all for Jesus; All my being's ransomed powers; All my thoughts, and words, and doings; All my days and all my hours?"

It is a grand and blessed law in God's providence, that if we try to increase our own joy by gratifying our desires and appetites, we find that the more we give them, the more they necessarily crave. But on the other hand, if we wish to increase our joy by denying our own desires and appetites and giving to the wants and necessities of others, we will find that our real gratification will increase and that the more we can give, the more the current of our true happiness will swell, multiplying the inner joys of the heart. To rejoice always, therefore, give always - "*There is that scattereth and yet increaseth!*"

One of God's prophets of old, when brought into circumstances in which everything of earthly comfort was slipping from his grasp, gave utterance to the beautiful words - "*Although the fig tree may not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice the Lord, I will joy in*

the God of my salvation!" Hab. 3:17,18. What an example of total trust and unquenchable joy is here set forth before us!

Let all the followers of Jesus therefore heed the Apostle's exhortation and "*Rejoice in the Lord always.*" It gives honour to the One who bought us, • to rejoice. Indeed, we owe it to God, to show to the world that our Saviour enables us to rejoice. In this way, perchance, we may draw others to come and drink of that spring from which we have received the water of life which makes even this present life for us an occasion of constant joy and rejoicing.

"Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." Isaiah 12:2,3.

The Birth of Christ

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Luke 2:10

The story of our Lord's birth is one so familiar as to require no special comment, and yet in its simple detail lies the hope of the whole world. Four thousand years previously, the birth of this child was promised, and all down those forty centuries some faithful souls continued to trust in God's promises to His faithful ones of old and to look for the salvation to be bought about through this promised child. We may be confident that the humble shepherds to whom the message of the Lord's advent first came were of those who thus hoped in the promises of God, for to such, and such only, God discloses His purposes.

The account of this angelic message to the shepherds is lovingly recorded for us by Luke in Chapter 2:8-20 of his gospel and, as another Christmas season nears, we may do well to reflect once more upon his account. We note that the shepherds were quietly tending their flocks by night, no doubt in the normal course of their occupation, when suddenly the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were sore afraid. (Verse 9) But their fear was soon overcome by the message of the angel, contained in our text, but which some strangely only partially quote, leaving out one of the greatest features of the message - namely, that it is to be to *all people*.

The message reads - "*Fear not; for, behold, I bring you GOOD TIDINGS of GREAT JOY which shall be to ALL PEOPLE.*" (Verse 10) It will be observed that the blessedness of the message is cumulative; first, it is "good tidings", then it is of "great joy", and then the crowning feature is that it is for "all people" - not only for those who on that night were looking for the hope of Israel, but for all their friends and relations, indeed for all mankind far and near, those now living and who shall live, and those now in death.

Blessed tidings! Harken to the gladsome sound - "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*" (Verse 11) He was to be a Saviour to ALL people; so the Scriptures clearly affirm, saying that, by the grace of God, He tasted death for every man, and that He gave Himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time, (Heb. 2:9.1 Tim. 2:6) The testifying to all in due time however, is also necessary to the salvation of the sinner as the fact that Christ gave Himself a Ransom for all.

The favour of salvation will not be forced upon any; but the testimony that it has been provided for all people on condition of their acceptance of that favour on God's terms, is to be given to all for their acceptance or rejection. Though millions of the race for whom Christ died have gone down to the grave without such testimony, the fact still remains that it shall be given in *due time*, which in their case must be after their awakening from death.

To this the words of our Lord agree - "*The hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgement.*" (John 5:28, 29) The former class are those who during the present life have accepted Christ as Saviour, come into judgement and passed their trial successfully - these gain life and the full reward of the faithful.

The latter class will come forth from the grave to have the truth of God's salvation testified to them *then* for their acceptance or rejection. Their final judgement for worthiness or unworthiness for life will be based upon their course under trial after the truth has been testified to them - during the Millennial Age. Thus the message of the angel, to the shepherds on the plain of Bethlehem, on that night so long ago, embraces the preaching of the good tidings of the restitution of all things. Good tidings of great joy to ALL people who have ever lived!

The beautiful story continues in the following Verses 12-20 of Luke's account. Following the message, the shepherds were told where and how they should find this bud of promise, so that when they should see Him they might be doubly assured. So we read - "*Then suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*" (Verses 13,14) Here we see how the angels of God are concerned in the affairs of mankind and we are remind-

ed of other scriptures to the effect that there is joy in heaven among the angels over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), that they are eager students of God's plans for human salvation (1 Pet. 1:12) and that they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. (Heb. 1:14)

O! what universal joy will prevail when the whole family of God in heaven and in earth is bought into fullest harmony under Jehovah's Anointed! As the poet declares:

In Christ, when all things are complete-
The things in earth and things in heaven-
The heavens *and* earth shall be replete-
With Thy praises ever given.

In Verses 15-18, we see the responsive attitude of the shepherds; they recognised the angels and their message as from the Lord, and their fears being allayed, their hopes revived and their faith increased, they felt that they must go at once and see that which had come to pass. When they found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger, they could not remain silent, but "*made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child. And all that they heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.*"

The account concludes - "*But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*" (Verse 19), doubtless calling to mind also the message of the angel to herself - Luke 1:28- 35. Again and again we seem to hear her say - "*my soul doth magnify the Lord for He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden He that is mighty hath done to me great things and holy is His name.*" -Luke 1:46-49. As for the shepherds, we read that they returned to their flocks, "*glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*" (Verse 20)

NATHANIEL

From Jesus' own mouth came a definition of a true Israelite and by extension we can say, of a true Israel, or a true Church. He saw Nathaniel coming towards Him and He said, "...an **Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!**" (John 1:47 NAS). That definition still stands. The Spirit of Christ in us still leaps in recognition when a Nathaniel comes into our presence. Nathaniel had not yet said a word. He had not uttered a single doctrinal truth or factually correct statement at the time that Jesus identified him. He was an Israelite indeed, a true Israelite, recognizable as such, not by his words but by his utter guilelessness. Nathaniel walked in truth, free from all pretence, all hidden meanings, all false appearances. He walked in and lived in the light; and it showed.

Arthur Katz

A Crown of Righteousness

"For 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: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

How noble and yet how solemn is Paul's statement! It is not in any spirit of egotism that the great Apostle penned the above lines as a part of his dying message. Rather, we believe it was in the spirit of meekness and lowliness that he here presents what is his best and innermost state of mind. Indeed he makes no boasts that he is looking forward to a reward as the *result of his own works of worthiness*, but on the ground of God's faithfulness. What a grand testimony! And at the conclusion of a grand life, nobly lived or rather, nobly sacrificed after the Lord's example-laid down for the brethren! How sublime the incentive for us who are seeking to walk in the narrow way! The secret of Paul's success and struggle in this way is to be seen in his holy and righteous motives and objectives-the *Divine approval* to be manifested in granting him a share in the "First Resurrection." (Phil. 3:10) This meant "a crown of righteousness"- glory, honour and immortality, association with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom. He knew of his own whole-heartedness in the Lord's service, and knew that the Lord was not unjust to forget his work and labour of love. Nevertheless, he did not expect the reward until "that day"- until the morning of the Resurrection-which *morning, in some important respects is already here*. Then the Redeemer, as the Head of the Church, would give to each faithful member an abundant reward-not to Paul only but to all those who similarly love His appearing-His revealing and manifestation in Millennial Kingdom glory.

As we glance through the Apostle's history we concur with his judgment, and *see that he was not boasting*; but was a faithful follower in the footsteps of Jesus; that he did make a good fight for right, for principle, for truth, for the Lord against sin and selfishness; that notwithstanding its narrowness and ruggedness, he did run faithfully over the course from the time that he started in it; that he *did keep the faith* to the close, at the cost of

self-denial, of self-sacrifice, hardships and persecutions. And here we must remember that “keeping the faith” is not merely holding to it theoretically, but believing with all the heart and the soul, and having it permeate all our affections and purposes-unto holiness and sanctification. Those who thus keep the faith will let it shine out to all those around them. This is *keeping* the faith.

Paul looks forward in his closing hours to a crown of righteousness. The Apostle James and John speak of the same crown and call it the “crown of life” (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10), and the Apostle Peter, speaking of the same, calls it the crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:4) The underlying thought of each of these expressions is evidently the same; namely, the custom in olden times of running races and *the giving of a crown to the successful runner* at the end of the course. As it was not sufficient to *enter* a race, or to start to run, but it was required that the race be run *faithfully and perseveringly to a conclusion*, so with this race which we are running as followers of Jesus, it is essential not only that we shall make consecration to the Lord, but that we *persevere* to the end, and our reward will be the crown of life in the sense that if faithful we will get life on the highest plane, inherent life, immortality. It will be a crown of righteousness in the sense that *only those who are approved of God as righteous* will thus be rewarded and glorified; and our hope is, therefore, that we may be accepted in the Beloved; that the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit; and that the rewards which God has promised to those who love Him and serve Him will be granted to us. The crown of glory is another name for the same grand reward- the glory of the Kingdom, the glory of immortality, the glory of the Father’s favor, the glory of being joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom.

The Apostle declares that this crown is *laid up* for him; he did not claim to possess it at the time, except by faith, and he had never seen it *except by the eye of faith*. This laying up of crowns is an expressive figure. The Scriptural thought seems to be that when justified believers enter the life of *uncompromising surrender to God* and are *accepted* as members of the Body of Christ, their names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, and crowns are *set apart for them*. If they are faithful, their names will never be blotted out, and crowns will be given to those whose names are upon the roll of honor, and they shall attain to their inheritance of the crown-their share in the Kingdom. (Rev. 3:5,11.) The Lord, the righteous Judge, *will determine the matter of worthiness or unworthiness* for the crowns. He will approve *all who run the race faithfully*; but being a righteous Judge, none may venture to hope that He will approve that which is evil, unrighteous, unfaithful; hence if our hearts condemn us not we may have peace and assurance with God.

What an encouragement is here for the very humblest of God’s people!- not by intellectual or physical strength, not by wonderful works, *not by anything we can do* or have done for the Lord, His cause, and His people, are we to hope for eternal glory; but simply with the Apostle we are to seek to use what talents we do possess and what opportunities the Lord provides for us, faithfully. We are to *keep* the faith, not *denying* the faith under any consideration- neither to secure favour of any, *nor to avoid the frowns of any*, may we be unfaithful to the Word of God’s testimony. We too, are to fight the good fight against selfishness in its every phase, especially in ourselves, and to develop in ourselves more and more under the Lord’s instruction, of His Spirit, the Spirit of love.-John 13:34,35; 1 Cor. 13:13.

What a sublime and inspiring character was that of Paul, and how exalted and worthy is his ministry unto this day! How glad we are that the Holy Spirit so directed the Apostle that *we also might know him better*, and might fully appreciate his loving loyalty to the King of kings; and understand the fact *clearly* that he was a chosen vessel of the Lord for the communication of the Truth to the entire Church, even including the Saints of these the closing hours of the Age!

Jesus is There

Haste my dull soul, arise,
cast off thy care;
Press for the promised prize,
mighty in prayer.
Jesus has gone before,
count all thy sufferings o’er;
He all thy burdens bore;
Jesus is there.

Souls, for the marriage feast,

robe and prepare-
Holy must be such guests;
Jesus is there!
Saints, bear your victory palms,
chant your celestial psalms,
Bride of the Lamb, thy charms
O seek to wear.

Kings for the promised throne,
crowns we shall wear;
Christ reigns, but not alone -
we soon shall share.
O ye despised ones, come;
pilgrims no more we'll roam;
Sweetly we'll rest at home;
Jesus is there.