

# Giving Thanks in Difficult Times

***“I will offer to thee  
the sacrifice of  
thanksgiving, and  
will call upon the  
name of the LORD.”***

***—Psalm 116:17***

*Preface: Shortly before this issue of “The Dawn” went to print, we all learned of the horrific shootings which occurred in Las Vegas during the nighttime hours of October*

*1st. A single gunman repeatedly shot from the 32nd floor of a hotel into a crowd attending an outdoor music festival across the street. At this writing, the death toll stands at 59, with more than 500 wounded, making it the worst mass killing in modern United States history. It seems inconceivable that such an event could in any way relate to the idea of a national day of Thanksgiving. The tragedy in Las Vegas is yet another of the many heartbreaking news stories which are recounted in the subsequent pages of this article. Indeed, trouble of every kind is rampant on the earth. Let us remember, however, the Scriptural assurance that these troublous times will soon give way to God’s kingdom of righteousness here upon the earth. For that promised time, we can truly be thankful for and look forward to, knowing that God’s Word is sure.*

**OUR TITLE SUGGESTS A** sentiment which is likely in the minds of many at this time. Even in North America, where most are accustomed to relative stability compared to many other parts of the world, numerous events in recent months have been devastating to, or at a minimum, greatly disrupted, the lives of millions of people. Much of this has taken place within our own country's borders, and in some cases perhaps, affected us personally.

It might seem unusual that much of the news in North America in the latter weeks of the summer did not relate to political or social issues, topics which usually fill the headlines. Indeed, the problems which plague these aspects of our society are no more resolved now than they have ever been. However, much of the news-making stories turned from these for a period, albeit temporarily, and focused on a matter completely out of man's control—the forces of nature.

## **DESTRUCTIVE EVENTS**

Consider these events, all of which took place during the space of one month, and which impacted millions of lives in North America:

Wildfires in the high northern plains of the United States, which destroyed tens of thousands of acres of land, and blanketed several states with harmful ash and smoke.

Hurricane Harvey, which in late August struck Texas, hovering over Houston, bringing devastating flooding to millions, and which is estimated to be the costliest hurricane on record in the United States.

Hurricane Irma, which in early September plowed through the Caribbean islands before landing a

direct hit to the Florida peninsula. Damage from wind and storm surge was heavy in many areas, and left millions without power.

A deadly earthquake of 7.1 magnitude in Mexico City in mid-September, in which many were killed, including young school children, and causing widespread destruction of buildings and infrastructure.

Hurricane Maria just a few days later, which struck Puerto Rico head-on, leaving the entire country without power, and causing incredible destruction.

It would not be surprising, when all is said and done, that the above series of natural calamities, in the aggregate, will end up being the most costly, in terms of total destruction caused, in the history of North America, if not the world. That is to say nothing of the personal suffering which has impacted millions of people, including the loss of many lives. Yet, most who have been directly affected say that regardless of the devastation, suffering, and mental anguish they have endured through these experiences, they are determined pick up the pieces, as it were, and move forward with their lives as best they can.

## **DIFFICULT TIMES—BUT STILL THANKFUL**

In spite of the great difficulties many still face in the aftermath of these events, this month millions of people in the United States will, at least for a few hours, turn away from the experiences and struggles of daily life and give thanks for their blessings. For most, perhaps, Thanksgiving Day will be one of feasting and family gatherings. Happy, indeed, will be those who also remember that every blessing of life which they enjoy comes to them from God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the giver of “every

good gift and every perfect gift.” (James 1:17) Among these will be many sincere worshipers of God, those who at heart are desirous of doing his will in all that they think, say and do.

The Bible tells us that it is appropriate at all times to give thanks to the Lord. Thus, the footstep followers of the Master are not to wait for special occasions to express their appreciation to their Heavenly Father for the spiritual and material blessings which are daily their portion. The Apostle Paul wrote that we should be “Giving thanks always for all things unto God.” He also exhorted us, saying, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” (Eph. 5:20; I Thess. 5:18) If we follow these admonitions, every day will be one of thanksgiving, because there will be much for which our hearts will turn to the Lord in grateful appreciation.

It is surely also appropriate that we observe special occasions of thanksgiving. At such times we can recall, in a more particular sense, the many ways in which God has blessed us throughout the year. Recalling these, we can renew our determination to show our appreciation to him. We are glad for a special occasion to “give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”—Ps. 106:1

## **CAUSES FOR THANKFULNESS**

For the true Christian, there is never a time in our life when the blessings received from the Lord are not more abundant than we could reasonably ask or expect. It would be beneficial that we develop the habit of noting from day to day the many ways in which God manifests his blessings toward us,

even in our trials and difficulties, though severe they may be. In so doing, we will perhaps be surprised to realize what our Heavenly Father has truly done for us. We can never, of course, count all of our blessings, but even as we attempt to do so, we will surely find, even as did the psalmist, that “they are more than can be numbered.”—Ps. 40:5

To all of Jesus’ footstep followers, God gives spiritual strength and guidance. He fills them with his Spirit in proportion as they are emptied of self and devote themselves to the doing of his will. How thankful indeed we should be for the assurance that he is more willing to give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him than are earthly parents to give “good gifts” to their children.—Luke 11:13

We can all be thankful that during the past year, the Lord’s grace has kept us from falling. (Jude 1:24,25) We are grateful to still rejoice in the Gospel message and in the privilege we have of laying down our lives in the Master’s service. (I John 3:16) These are great causes for thankfulness. Indeed, we are in no way surprised that the Lord would continue to hold us in the hollow of his hand, and provide us grace to help in every time of need. However, we recall the Apostle Peter’s admonition in which he informs us that it is only if we “do these things” that we can have the assurance that we shall “never fall.” (II Pet. 1:10) If, therefore, we have been kept from falling, it means that the Lord has been pleased with our efforts to do his will. Though we have not done so perfectly, it is because of our sincere endeavors in this regard that he has blessed us with his sustaining grace.

## **BLESSINGS OF UNDERSTANDING**

Those who have been blessed with an understanding of God's plan for many years can be thankful that throughout this time the Lord has become ever more precious, and that the Gospel message has grown more brilliant with each passing year. That such have maintained a clear vision of the great unchanging fundamentals of that plan is evidence of God's keeping power in their lives. They have no will of their own, but are determined that the Lord's will only shall rule supreme in their lives, regardless of what it might mean in the way of sacrificing.—Rom. 12:1,2

Others have been blessed with a knowledge of God's plan within more recent years. How we rejoice also with them. It is impossible to adequately give thanks to the Lord for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit which has opened the eyes of our understanding so we might behold his glory. We know that, whereas once we were spiritually blind, now we can see. How glorious is the vision that enables us to comprehend God's purposes for the blessing of both the church and the world. May our "first love" for the Lord and for his truth never "wax cold," but increase daily, and our thankfulness overflow continually.—Rev. 2:4; Matt. 24:12

## **THANKFUL FOR KINGDOM HOPE**

Today the world is filled with fear as mankind sees the gathering forces of trouble which surpass anything that has been experienced in the past. We see Jesus' prophetic words being fulfilled: "There shall be . . . upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's

hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”—Luke 21:25,26

Today, man has the ability to know in an instant what is going on in every corner of the world, at any moment, day or night. Thus, people would immediately know the frightful destruction that leaders of conflicting ideologies, religious extremism, and some nations might choose to bring upon those considered as enemies. Daniel prophesied of this very period as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,” concerning which Jesus confirmed as “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be.”—Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21

We note Jesus’ words, “no, nor ever shall be.” How vitally important is this statement, for it assures us that there is hope beyond the present season of unprecedented trouble. Indeed, an understanding of God’s plan enables us to see beyond the troublous seas, and to know that soon there will be a great calm. By the administrative powers of the Messianic kingdom, mankind will be guided into their desired haven of security and peace. To have this assurance is truly great cause for thanksgiving. For those who would like to know more concerning the wonderful promises of the future, we invite you to read the booklet, *Armageddon then World Peace*. We will be glad to send it to you free and without obligation. Our contact information is listed on the inside of the back cover at the bottom of the page. The booklet is also available for reading on our website: <http://www.dawnbible.com/books.htm>

## **JOYS OF FELLOWSHIP AND BEARING WITNESS**

During the year, many have been richly blessed through the privilege of fellowship with one another. How spiritually stimulating this has been. If our fellowship has been truly that of the Spirit, it has meant much more than merely rejoicing together in the Lord. Of those who speak “often one to another” concerning God’s wonderful plan, the prophet tells us that the Lord hearkens, that he hears, and that a “book of remembrance” has been written. (Mal. 3:16) Even when there may be only a very few, Jesus promised, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20) Indeed, we should be thankful for, and take advantage of, as many opportunities as possible to gather together in the Lord’s name.

The Lord also has continued to give his people opportunities to serve him by serving one another, and by bearing witness to the Truth. Surely we should always be thankful for our privileges of being “ambassadors for Christ.” (II Cor. 5:20) Many such opportunities have no doubt been ours. Individually, we have had the privilege of speaking a word for the Master and for the Gospel message, perhaps to a neighbor, or a friend, or a coworker. To the extent we have taken advantage of these opportunities, we know that there is no time when the Lord seems so near to us, and when his truth is a greater inspirational power in our lives, than when we are explaining it to others. This is especially true when those to whom we speak are hungering earnestly and give evidence that God has blessed them with hearing ears and understanding hearts.



We rejoice to share in the joys resulting from the knowledge that here and there throughout the world the light of truth is shining—in some cases for the first time—into the hearts and lives of those to whom God has given the ability to see. Knowing this, and having so many other manifold blessings from God, how much would we take for our knowledge of his glorious plan? We know that it is priceless, and that it means more to us than life itself. How thankful we should be, then, that by our sacrifices and service this priceless treasure has become the blessed possession of others.

## **MIRACLES OF COMMUNICATION**

Today, we have extraordinary miracles of communication, by which the message of God's plan and his coming kingdom are available. Fifty years ago, these "miracles" were that of radio and television, and what miracles they were, as the Gospel was made available in millions of homes every week. Indeed, these methods of spreading the message are still of great importance in bearing witness to the Truth.

Over the last two decades, more miracles of communication have increased the opportunities of proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom. Laptop computers, the Internet, handheld and portable communication devices of every shape, size, and capability are inexpensively available to nearly all of earth's population. The ability to see video, hear audio, and read the message of the Bible on these devices, as well as correspond with others via email, Skype, and a host of other means of electronic communication, has opened up many new avenues of service during this Harvest period of the Gospel Age.

We are not surprised, however, that the increase of knowledge, which has precipitated the present explosion of communication, has had a very detrimental effect upon the world in general. It has fostered fear, selfishness, sin, and evil of every kind imaginable. Indeed, when Daniel foretold of the time when “knowledge shall be increased,” it was part of his prophecy concerning the “time of trouble” previously cited. (Dan. 12:1,4) How grateful we are, though, that these areas of increased knowledge may be used in a positive way—to spread the Word of truth, and bring honor to the name of our Heavenly Father. For this, too, we are thankful.

When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, he told Moses to take off his shoes, with the explanation that the place where he was standing was “holy ground.” (Exod. 3:5) Should we not feel the same way concerning the ground on which we are standing today? Is it not standing on higher ground than the world around us to have the opportunity and honor to serve the Lord in his vineyard? (Matt. 20:1-16) Realizing the sacredness of the position which is now ours of being God’s ambassadors, let us give attentive ears to his voice, and respond loyally as he makes clear the various ways he wants us to lay down our lives for him.

Surely we can do no less at this Thanksgiving season of the year than to echo the sentiments of the psalmist when he wrote, “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, In the courts of the LORD’S house. . . . Praise ye the LORD.”—Ps. 116:17-19