

A Sun and Shield

***“The LORD God is
a sun and shield:
the LORD will give
grace and glory: no
good thing will he
withhold from
them that walk
uprightly.”
—Psalm 84:11***

THE APOSTLE PETER

tells us that those striving to follow in the footsteps of Jesus have been given “exceeding great and precious promises,” by which we may be made “partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) Our Heavenly Father, in providing these promises, has used various illustrations to help us grasp their reality, and the intimacy of our relationship to him makes them even more valuable to us.

Take, for example, the illustration used at the beginning of our text: “The LORD God is a sun.” What thoughts of brightness and cheer this stirs up within us! How often the immediate circumstances of life are dark and foreboding. This is true in the experiences of all mankind. The reign of sin and death has had a blighting effect upon all. However, we who have been blessed to know the Lord find ourselves out of harmony with our surroundings in the world. The things that afford some joy to the world by and large mean little or nothing to us. Thus the darkness that covers the earth because

of Satan's rulership would be most depressing except for the fact that God is our "sun."

In our struggles against various adversaries—the world, the flesh, and the devil—the outlook often seems dark. Should it continue, we would become discouraged and would faint by the wayside. The Lord, however, is watching over us. When he sees we have learned a needed lesson, the dark clouds of despair with which we are surrounded part, and we see the sunshine of divine love. Almost instantly all is light around us. We walk with a firmer step, and our hearts rejoice, because we know that the Lord is with us and has shone upon us.

A "SHIELD"

The Lord is also a "shield" unto his people. To Abram God said, "Fear not, ... I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1) This was true of Abram, the father of the faithful, and it has been true of all God's people since. (Rom. 4:11-16) In this promise the Lord uses a shield to symbolize the thought of protection. To Abram much of the protection was along physical lines, but with us at the present time it is largely along spiritual lines.

God was also Abraham's "exceeding great reward." Although the patriarch had left his own country and gone into a strange land, God prospered him. Ultimately the promise of a seed was fulfilled to this "friend of God." (James 2:23) How richly the Lord rewards us as we journey on toward the heavenly Canaan, confident that since he is our shield no harm can come to us.

God's protection is over his people in various ways. In Psalm 91:4 we read that the Lord's Truth

will be our “shield and buckler.” We are being protected as New Creatures. The attacks against us are made on the mind. The enemy’s arrows are often “bitter words” and deceptive, lying words, designed to cast doubt and instill fear into our hearts and minds. (Ps. 64:3) To protect us against these poison darts of the Adversary, the Lord has given us his Word of Truth as a shield. Indeed, it constitutes a complete “armor,” with its shield of faith, breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, sandals of peace, and garments girded together with truth.—Eph. 6:13-17

When we think of the shield alone as being the Truth that protects us against our enemies, we can consider it from a more intimate standpoint, as contained in God’s promise that he will never leave or forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) We rejoice in God’s great plan of salvation for all mankind, but how precious it is to hear him say to us, individually: “Be not afraid, I am thy shield. Continue to put your trust in me. Go often to the throne of grace, and you will find strength to help in every time of need. Your enemies may be hateful and strong, but greater is he who is for you than all who are against you. I am on your side and will not permit you to be harmed as my spiritual child.”—John 10:28-30; I John 4:4

The psalmist details the matter for us, saying: “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of

the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation.”—Ps. 91:5-9

God, by his promises, assures us of protection, and he implements those promises by constituting the angels as our guardians. “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) The angels are powerful spirit beings, and they are equipped with needed knowledge of God’s will for each of his people. They know when to ease the burden and make the way smoother. They know when to part the clouds so that we may see the “sun,” in order that its enlightening, warming rays may dispel the darkness with which our hearts may be overwhelmed.

HIS FAVOR

“The LORD will give grace and glory,” our text declares. That is, God will show us his favor and kindness, which is the thought contained in the Hebrew word here translated “grace.” How many wonderful ways the Lord bestows his lovingkindness upon his people! David wrote: “How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”—Ps. 36:7-9

God’s “house” during the present age is his people, and how “fat” indeed are the provisions he has made for them! (I Pet. 2:5; 4:17) In this end of the Gospel Age especially, he has provided “meat in

due season” for his household, the glorious truths of his glorious plan of salvation for both the church and the world. (Matt. 24:45) We have rich, nourishing, and stimulating teachings of his Word upon which to feed and thereby become strong in the Lord and grow up into our Head, Christ Jesus.

DRINKING OF GOD’S PLEASURES

The Lord has also made us to “drink of the river” of his pleasures. God’s pleasure is manifest in all his works: “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (Rev. 4:11) We share this pleasure with our Heavenly Father, for we know his human creation will ultimately be reconciled to him and will praise and magnify his holy name throughout all eternity.

God takes special pleasure in his New Creation. To Jesus he said, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22) What great pleasure we also take in Jesus! He is our beloved Elder Brother, our Exemplar, our Advocate, our Captain, our High Priest, and our Head. He is to us the “chiefest among ten thousand,” the one “altogether lovely”—a constant friend and companion.—Song of Sol. 5:10,16

Again we read, “The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear [reverence] him, in those that hope in his mercy.” (Ps. 147:11) A similar thought is expressed in Psalm 149:4: “The LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.” These describe more of God’s “rivers of [his] pleasure” of which he has given us the privilege of drinking.

Surely we also find pleasure in our association with the Lord’s people, the blessed people of God

who “know the joyful sound” of the Gospel message. (Ps. 89:15,16) Among these there are not many wise, not many rich, not many noble insofar as the world’s standards are concerned, but they are prized very highly by the Heavenly Father and should be by one another.—I Cor. 1:26-28

The fellowship of Christian brotherhood is very precious to each of the Lord’s consecrated people. There is nothing else like it in the world. To be a part of it and to experience the blessed “tie that binds” the hearts of all its members together in the bonds of Christian love is another of the rivers of pleasure that refresh and rejoice the hearts of all to whom the Lord is a sun and shield.

In Isaiah 53:10 reference is made to another of God’s pleasures. The prophecy of this verse concerns the purpose for which Jesus came to earth, that is, to carry out the loving plan of the Creator for the reconciliation and restoration of the fallen human race. The entire world of mankind restored to life as perfect human beings is spoken of in this text as the “seed,” or children, of Christ. Jesus was “cut off out of the land of the living” without children. (vs. 8) Yet, as Isaiah declares, he “shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

We are sure to make frequent reference to those things that give us pleasure. God, likewise, throughout his Word, speaks over and over again of his great pleasure and plan to restore the dead world to life. Peter refers to that plan for “restitution” and says it was “spoken by the mouth of all [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:21

This “pleasure” of Jehovah was part of the “joy that was set before” Jesus, which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame associated with laying down his life for the sins of the world. (Heb. 12:2) The knowledge of this glorious Truth of God’s plan satisfies our longings as nothing else could do. We love to talk about it and to do all we can to make it known to others. It is a story that never grows old, a veritable river of pleasure indeed.

God’s purpose in the “great salvation” of the present Gospel Age is another river of his pleasure. (Heb. 2:3) It is our privilege to cooperate with our Heavenly Father in attaining to this “high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Paul admonishes us to “work out” our own salvation, and he adds, “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

We can be assured that, regardless of how difficult the way may be or how many difficult experiences may tend to discourage us from our course of sacrifice, he who is our sun and shield will continue to work in us to accomplish his good pleasure. “Fear not,” Jesus said, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

The Heavenly Father has foreordained the faithful church class “unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” He has also made known to us “the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph. 1:5,9,10

AND GLORY

Surely those to whom the Lord is a sun and shield are a favored people. We are blessed by his grace, his loving-kindness, as a rich present inheritance. Thus, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" for a future spiritual inheritance. (II Cor. 4:17) In his prayer on behalf of his followers, Jesus said to his Father: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."—John 17:22,23

The glory of the divine nature and the glory of the kingdom was given to Jesus by promise from the Heavenly Father. Jesus promised the same glory to his disciples. They were to "sit on thrones"; they were to have the "kingdom"; they were to do "greater works" than he had done while in the flesh; they were to have a "resurrection of life," and they were to be with him in the "place" he went away to "prepare."—Luke 22:29,30; John 5:28,29; 14:2,3,12

After the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, the apostles understood the meaning of these wonderful promises of future glory. John wrote: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called 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."—I John 3:1,2

Peter wrote: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:12,13

Paul likens this promised glory to the bright shining countenance of Moses when he came down from the mountain bringing with him the tables of the Law. (II Cor. 3:3-12) In verse 18 of this chapter, Paul speaks of our beholding the “glory of the Lord” in a glass, or mirror, and says that we are “changed into the same image from glory to glory.”

James states: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [Greek: a putting to the proof]: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (James 1:12) Jude likewise exhorts: “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Closing his epistle, he commends us to him who is able to keep us from falling, the one who is our sun and shield and will present us “faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”—Jude 1:21,24

NO GOOD THING WITHHELD

Our text concludes with the blessed assurance that no “good thing” will be withheld from those who walk uprightly. Indeed, “every good gift and every perfect gift” that comes down from the “Father of lights” will be ours to enjoy.—James 1:17

Let us take heed lest we permit these good gifts of God to become commonplace. First, there is that

“unspeakable gift” of his beloved Son. (II Cor. 9:15) How we should continue to treasure him! Through him we have the gift of “eternal life.” We are also richly blessed by the gift of the Holy Spirit—its enlightenment, its comfort, and its strength. By it we are also begotten again to a new hope of life, becoming New Creatures in Christ Jesus.—Rom. 6:23; Luke 11:13; II Cor. 5:17

Paul speaks of the gifts of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists provided to us by God. (Eph. 4:11) All these gifts are shared in common by the Lord’s people and are a part of the means by which the Heavenly Father is to us a sun and shield. In addition to these gifts of God that are shared and enjoyed by all his people, he continually showers us individually with good things that are needful in order to make our calling and election sure. The guardian angels know exactly what each one of the Lord’s people needs.

There are many things we may properly think of as being “good,” such as the Truth, fellowship with the brethren, opportunities of service, and the overruling providences of God. If we remain humble before the Lord and pure of heart, we will enjoy these blessings in good measure.

However, for reasons known to him, God might, for example, not think it good for us to be too robust in health. He may know that a trial of ill health would be the very best thing for our spiritual welfare. We know that he is able to cause all things to work together for our good. (Rom. 8:28) We do not need to understand exactly why the Lord permits us to have the trial that is bearing down so heavily upon us today. All we know

and all we need to know is that he loves and cares, that he is our sun and shield, and that he gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him.

Our joy and our comfort, therefore, will continue to be in the fact that because the Lord is the light of our lives, we can walk in the dark with him and not lose our way. Although we have enemies within and foes without, nevertheless, because he is our refuge, our strength, our shield, and our rock, no harm can come to our eternal interests as a New Creature. Praise the Lord for the assurance that because he is our sun and shield all good things are ours to enjoy and that he is able to turn into good those experiences which, while unpleasant, he is causing to work out for us the promised “eternal weight of glory!” ■