

“Fear Erases Hope”

AS THE WORLD approached the beginning of the third millennium since Christ appeared on earth, there was much fear. There were the usual dire predictions of a coming doomsday with fire and disaster. There was the fear of modern technology failure in computer command control because of Y2K problems. Apprehension was rife. People were cautioned to be prepared with flashlights in the event of power failure; with bottled water in the case of water failure; with food in case of supermarket computer failure; and with money in case of bank computer failure. Except for isolated cases, these did not occur.

In the midst of this apprehension, the country of Venezuela was stricken by a huge natural disaster causing the loss of many lives. Starting on December 15th, three days of torrential rain caused huge landslides down a mountain on the fringes of Caracas, the major city of that country. Two weeks later, the estimated dead numbered 20,000 to 30,000 and 150,000 were made homeless. The nation continues the grim task of searching for bodies. A reporter for the *“New York Times”* phrased the attitude of the people very well when he wrote: “Fear erases hope as Venezuelans search for the dead.” It is true that “Hope springs eternal in the human breast,” but sometimes fear can mount to the point that it erases hope completely.

LOSS OF HOPE

This loss of hope is bad enough where the expectancy of good things is involved. In this case, the fear is that bodies of the dead may never be found to be given a proper burial. This is not the only disaster that marked the year 1999. Severe earthquakes, with much loss of life, occurred twice in Turkey, once in Taiwan, creating the same kind of fear. There were some people who wondered if these natural disasters, occurring with such frequency, had some significance. Armed conflicts continue in other parts of the world and suffering humanity continues to look at all the problems in the world with the reaction described by Jesus as “distress of nations, with perplexity.”—Luke 21:25

Speaking of our time, he said that the hearts of the people would fail them for fear as they looked forward to the things coming upon the earth. (Luke 21:26) Jesus' reference to the fear that would fill the hearts of the people is sufficient to indicate that he was referring to the present time, for never before has there been such widespread fear on the part of the people, especially the leaders, as there is today.

When Jesus said that there would be upon the earth 'distress of nations, with perplexity,' he illustrated his thought by likening it to the roaring of the sea and the waves. This is a very apt symbol, indeed, of the restless, discontented masses of mankind today as they strive hopelessly to avert the havoc which they fear will be wrought by the onrushing tide of human selfishness implemented by the ghastly instruments of destruction provided by the very science that at one time boasted its ability to lead the world into peace and goodwill.

WE WILL NOT FEAR

The Prophet David also foretold this time in which we are living; and, like Jesus, he, too, likened the chaos of the world to the relentless lashing of sea and waves, as the clamorous demands of men and nations strike out against the bulwarks of a civilization that was once thought to be impregnable. David's prophecy is addressed to those who have faith in the Word of God, and of these he declares, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."—Ps. 46:2,3

As Christians, we need not fear what is coming upon the earth; that is, we will not fear if we acquaint ourselves with the prophecies of the Bible and have faith in what they declare concerning today and tomorrow. The prophecies of the Bible contain the only genuine explanation of the cause of present world distress, and furnish the only hopeful view of the final outcome of this present dark period of fear. To know the plan of God pertaining to human destiny is to have peace and joy in our own hearts, despite the fear with which we are surrounded, and also to be in a position to radiate comforting assurance to others.

The world of mankind in general does not have the faith necessary to be comforted by an understanding of these prophecies. Fear of worse things to come, both here and hereafter, has helped to rob men and

women of the joy which temporarily, at least, might otherwise be theirs. Truly, as the Scriptures declare, it has been an evil world, and the more we study its characteristics, the more we realize that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he declared Satan to be its prince. Satan uses his influence to blind the minds of the world so that they cannot understand God's ultimate purposes.—II Cor. 4:4

We can be glad that our eyes have been enlightened to the fact that such a world is coming to an end, and that—as the Scriptures declare—its ruler is to be bound and finally destroyed. Jesus said that those living at this time who had faith in his Word, when they saw the things transpire which he foretold, should lift up their heads with hope and rejoicing, for the time of their deliverance, and the deliverance of mankind, from sin and death would be near.—Luke 21:28

ENEMIES DESTROYED

In an inspired prophecy of Christ's kingdom given us by the Apostle Paul he declares that Christ must reign until all enemies are put under his feet, and that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. (I Cor. 15:24-26) This indicates that one purpose of the reign of Christ is for the destruction of enemies—enemies of God, of man, and of righteousness. While death will be the last of these enemies to be eradicated by the rulership of Christ, other enemies will be destroyed prior to that time, and among the first of these are the selfish and sinful institutions of earth which stand in the way of Christ's rulership of justice and righteousness. The destruction of these implies temporary trouble and distress for the people who have been held in bondage to them. It is this that is described by the Prophet Daniel as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1

But the overthrow of the institutions of sin and selfishness—those institutions which have fostered oppression and war—is only the beginning of the work of the Divine Christ. It is like the surgeon's knife used to save the life of a dying patient. For approximately six thousand years, the human race has been dying. Man himself has not been able to find a remedy for the poisonous sting of sin which is inflicting death upon all. Now Christ, the great physician, has come to change all this, and the first necessary move is to place mankind—the patient—in a new environment, and under just and righteous laws. It is the preparation for

this that is causing the breakdown of human authority everywhere throughout the earth.

THE LAST DAYS

A prophecy pertinent to these preparations is given by the Prophet Micah as follows: “In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and the people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:1-4

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

We are even now living in the beginning of these prophetic ‘last days.’ When rightly understood, the last days foretold in the prophecies are a glorious time in which to be living, and before long it shall come to pass, even as the prophet has declared, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and people shall flow unto it. The ‘mountain of the Lord’ is the kingdom of the Lord.

Daniel, in the second chapter of his prophecy, symbolically depicts human rulership over the earth by a “terrible,” (Dan. 2:31) humanlike image which was very bright; and the end of this rulership is pictured by the destruction of the image. The instrument of destruction is shown to be a stone, which ultimately grows until it becomes a great mountain which fills the whole earth. In his interpretation of this wonderful prophecy, Daniel tells us that this mountain which fills the whole earth is the kingdom of God.—Dan. 2:44

This house of the Lord is God’s ruling house, made up of those whom the Scriptures identify as his own family of sons. Jesus is chief among these, and together with him will be those who have accepted the

invitation to suffer and die with him. To these the promise is given that they shall live and reign with him. (Rev. 20:4) The Apostle Paul reassures the followers of the Master on this point, saying, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:16,17

“And people shall flow unto it,” continues Micah’s prophecy. (Mic. 4:1) Human experience thus far has been that when imperialistic governments sought to extend their spheres of influence over other nations, many fled for refuge into other countries. But it will not be so in the case of Christ’s kingdom. As the people learn of its extending power they will, as the prophet declares, flow unto it.

Giving us further details along this same line, the prophecy continues, “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” (vs. 2) By the time this portion of the prophecy is fulfilled, the nations will have learned the futility and folly of their own ways. Failure having attended their every effort to save their world from chaos and ruin, they will then be ready to look to him who alone can provide the solution, even to Christ, the one who by that time will be recognized as the rightful king of earth.

LEARN WAR NO MORE

And when the nations are willing to learn the Lord’s ways and apply them, what will be the result? It will be a most happy result, for the prophecy declares that they will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks” (vs. 3), and that they shall learn war no more. Human wisdom has always contended that the only way to keep the peace is to be prepared for war. But this order will be reversed by earth’s new King, for as the nations come under the hallowed influence of his kingdom laws, the resources of the earth—which formerly were diverted to provide the sinews of war—will be used to supply the people with the necessities of life.

“Neither shall they learn war any more.” (vs. 3) Think of the far-reaching changes in human outlook and experience these few words imply! They do away with peacetime conscription, and wartime drafts. They assure the mothers of all nations that they will not be raising their

sons to be used as cannon fodder. They do away with European and Asiatic militarism in all its ugly forms. They take away fear from the hearts of the people, for all realize that when the nations no longer learn war, they will not engage in war. Thank God for a program of education which omits from its curriculum the strategy of war!

UNDER THE VINE AND FIG TREE

Because the people will then learn and practice the ways of peace and righteousness, they will have economic security. This assurance is given us in that beautiful picture of every man sitting under his vine and fig tree. This is just another way of saying that under the administration of Christ's kingdom, the resources of earth will be available to all, and that the rights of all to share equally in those resources will be guaranteed by the laws of the Divine kingdom. Because this will be true, the prophecy adds, "And none shall make them afraid." (Mic. 4:4) Thank God for this assurance of freedom from fear!

'None shall make them afraid!' Fear of aggression haunts the minds of all people today, and this fear is not limited to the possible or threatened aggression of nations. Economic aggression, with its resulting price gouging, inflicts almost equally severe suffering upon the masses. So fear, engendered by man's inhumanity to man along many lines, continues to destroy the heritage of peace and joy which is the right of every human being, whose original parents were created in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26) Under the laws of Christ's kingdom, that right will be restored, for then none shall 'make afraid.'

DEATH DESTROYED

We have already noted Paul's assurance of the destruction of death in the kingdom of God. Now note Isaiah 25:6-9. In this prophecy, even as in the prophecy of Micah, the kingdom of the Lord is symbolized by a mountain, and we are told that in this mountain death will be swallowed up in victory, and that "the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces." (vs. 8) "And it shall be said in that day," continues the prophet, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—vs. 9

This is the glorious hope which now can be held out to the people of a distressed and fear-filled world! It is a glorious hope, and in proclaiming it we are following the suggestion of the prophet when he wrote, “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.”—Isa. 35:4

One of the descriptive names given to our day in prophecy is the “Day of Vengeance.” (Isa. 61:2) It is a time when God’s righteous anger is manifested in the overthrow of age-old systems and institutions of sin and oppression. While fear and distress are experienced by the people as a result of the uprooting of this present evil world, the ultimate purpose of God is to save the people from sin and death through the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.

Hence, we can say to the world today—to this fear-filled world: ‘Fear not,’ for Divine intervention in the affairs of men will soon bring peace and health and life—yea, the opportunity for everlasting salvation—to all the families of the earth!

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Appeal for Unity

***Key Verse: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”
—I Corinthians 1:10***

***Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 1:2-17***

IN ADDRESSING THE church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul refers to them as “sanctified in the Anointed Jesus, constituted Holy Ones.” (I Cor. 1:2, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) He identifies these as those who have accepted through faith the merit of Jesus’ shed blood, and have given their hearts to God in unreserved consecration. Being called of God and set apart, or sanctified through Christ Jesus, these had received God’s unmerited favor and his peace, as identified in verse 3.

In verses 4-9, Paul offers an expression of thanks that is typical of his other epistles. Notice that Paul’s thanks are rendered not directly to the Corinthians, but rather to God, by

whose grace they had been “enriched.” Paul mentions in his thanks to God precisely some of those things that the Corinthians had not always used wisely: “utterance” and “knowledge,” “the testimony of Christ” (vss. 5,6), and spiritual “gifts.” (vs. 7) Also, Paul does not immediately focus on their misconduct. Instead he lovingly reminds them (vss. 8,9) that their strength depends, both now and in the future, on God’s faithfulness, which he assures will be unfailing through “the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”—vs. 9

Paul finally begins to address one of the difficulties afflicting the church at Corinth: the breakdown of unity and the proliferation of divisions. This was evidently a major problem for these brethren, because Paul gives careful attention to the matter in different ways throughout the epistle.

The primary problem appears to have been the Corinthians' desire for human leadership. Factions had cropped up around various figures accorded prominence within the church. Verse 12 states that some claimed to be followers of Paul, others of Apollos, still others of Cephas (Peter), with some correctly claiming to be followers of Christ (but having the wrong spirit).

In giving thanks that he had baptized only a few (vss. 14,16), Paul chided the Corinthians for elevating their leaders improperly, thereby causing serious injury to the churches in Christ. (vs. 13) Paul wanted no part of this spirit. His sole mission, he states in verse 17, was "to preach the Gospel," and to do so in such a way that the power of Christ's cross would in no way be compromised.

The lesson for the church today is the same as it was for the brethren of Corinth. God has seen fit to provide us with many human instruments to teach us and guide us along the narrow way. However, great damage can be caused to both these instruments as well as ourselves if we have the same spirit of division or human elevation that plagued the Corinthians. As Jesus himself said, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren."—Matt. 23:8

Let each strive to do his part in maintaining the spirit of unity in the church, remembering that there is but "One body, and one Spirit ... One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all."—Eph. 4:4-6

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True Wisdom: A Basis for Unity

Key Verse: *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”*

—I Corinthians 2:12

Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 2:1, 2, 4-13, 15, 16

PAUL’S MESSAGE CAN best be understood as a meditation on Christ as the power and wisdom of God. To the Corinthians, who had split into factions behind their favorite leaders, Paul emphasized that such conduct was totally inappropriate to the character of the Gospel that he proclaimed. He stated that God’s power and wisdom were shown, once and for all, through “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (I Cor. 2:2) Likewise, Paul minimized himself and his own preaching, saying that his speech was not eloquent or persuasive by human standards. (vss. 1,4) What a wise course of

action Paul took by proclaiming the Gospel in a way to divert the church’s attention away from his skill as a teacher, and redirect it solely to “the power of God.”—vs. 5

Paul carefully points out that the wisdom he preached was only to those who were mature, and it was not “the wisdom of this world.” (vs. 6) Furthermore, Paul states that God’s supreme wisdom is cloaked in mystery, hidden from this world. This mystery was the cross of Jesus Christ. Before the world and its creation, God ordained the cross as the means for our glory, the means of our salvation.—vs. 7

Paul continues to elaborate upon the idea that no one can truly understand God and his ways unless they have received the Spirit that comes from God. (vs. 14) This is the thought of our Key Verse. Nevertheless, let no one misunderstand Paul in his use of the terms “spirit” and “spiritual,” which are not referring to outward practices and words that simply give a pious or devotional appearance. Rather, Paul is saying that to live in the Spirit means that our lives have been illuminated by new standards that are radically different from those by which the world in general lives and makes decisions.

Through the power and influence of God’s Holy Spirit, the church develops “the mind of Christ” (vs. 16), by which they can perceive and act in conformity with God’s will. To discern and do God’s will in this way is not the result of logic or education. (vs. 13) It owes nothing to any natural insight or special achievement on our part. It is not subject to correction by this world’s fallen standards of judgment. Only through the leading of God’s Spirit has the church true wisdom, the wisdom that “searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—vs. 10

This wisdom that comes to those possessing God’s Holy Spirit is described by the Apostle James as “first pure [holy], then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) This wisdom must be the starting point for unity. For one must first become united with God before they can expect to achieve wisdom on any other front. That is why it is of such importance. Whenever there is a lack of unity among the brotherhood we must look inwardly first, examining ourselves: are we practicing the world’s wisdom, or that of our Father, under the influence of his Spirit.

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Mature Leaders Bring Unity

*Key Verse: “Let a man
so account of us, as of
the ministers of Christ,
and stewards of the
mysteries of God.”
—I Corinthians 4:1*

*Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 4:1-13*

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH had put Paul and other leaders, such as Apollos, on tall pedestals for human admiration. In the Key Verse, Paul reminds the Corinthians how apostles ought to be reckoned: as ministers (servants) and stewards (trustees or managers) of God’s mysteries, his plan of salvation. By doing this he was telling them that he, Apollos, and others, are not to be regarded as those to whom the church

should direct their glory and honor. Rather, Paul removed himself from this sentiment entirely, saying that he desired only to be accounted as serving God.

Paul realized that the Corinthians were prone to self-inflation and would perhaps misunderstand his words. If he and others alone are subject to God, then what’s to prevent them from acting inappropriately, rationalizing their actions afterward? Hence Paul wrote: “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (I Cor. 4:2) Further commenting on this, Paul says that the one who determines the faithfulness of these stewards, including himself, is the Lord alone. Neither the Corinthian brethren, a human court, or even Paul himself, was capable of doing this, only the Lord. (vss. 3,4) In this, the only praise sought was the “praise of God.”—vs. 5

In verse 6, Paul makes it clear that he used himself and Apollos as illustrations of the point that no one, neither the apostles, the brethren in Corinth, nor any of the Lord’s followers, should be puffed up with pride. What makes such an attitude even more displeasing to the Lord is that it is usually at the expense, or to the detriment, of someone else. “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (vs. 7) These rhetorical questions point out the fact that fleshly differences among the Lord’s people are inconsequential, since

everything, without exception, is to be received as a gift from God, regardless of who we are or our position in the church.

Paul continues by pointing out the irony of the Corinthian brethren's attitude. He says they are acting as though they were already sitting on glorious thrones in power. Paul wonders aloud, where was he and where were the other apostles when this took place? (vs. 8) By contrast, he reviews all the hardships that he and the other apostles were still suffering for the Gospel's sake, Paul states that they have been "made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." (vs. 9) The image given here is that of the arena, and the use of prisoners for games, pitting them against wild animals and gladiators. Included in these comments, Paul states: "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it."—vs. 12

These words echo those of Jesus as he preached his sermon on the mount: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."—Matt. 5:10-12

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Discipline Brings Unity

Key Verse: “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

—I Corinthians 5:8

***Selected Scripture:
I Corinthians 5:1-13***

THIS LESSON BEGINS WITH Paul making reference to the report of immorality in the Corinthian church. Such actions not only violated the Mosaic Law, but also were esteemed as evil by the ‘pagan’ Gentiles. Even more astonishing to Paul was the fact that the church did not appear upset, nor had they done anything about the situation that had developed.

Paul was very solemn in giving his directions for the appropriate course of action to be taken by the Corinthians. Although he certainly did not take joy in this matter, it was imperative that apostolic judgment be rendered. He was, however, very careful in stating that this was being done “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—I Cor. 5:4

It was not the intention of Paul to judge the individual’s eternal destiny, but simply to judge the matter, and to act in the best interests of the church as a whole. His desire was that, in this individual, “the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (vs. 5) Although Paul was addressing the Corinthian brethren, the larger lesson is for the entire church.

He likens sin to leaven (vs. 6), and that a very small amount can adversely affect the entire life of a Christian. Hence, it becomes necessary for each one to purge, get rid of, those aspects of thoughts, words, and actions that have a leavening or corrupting influence, whether upon others or ourselves. The true followers of Jesus are to be “unleavened” (vs. 7) in the sense that they are striving to follow as closely as possible in the footsteps of their perfect pattern, Jesus Christ. He was our Passover, our “bread of life.” (John 6:48) He was completely unleavened, perfect, and we are to partake of him by seeking to follow his example as closely as possible.

The Key Verse points out that this process of following in the footsteps of Jesus, our unleavened bread of life, is likened to the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread kept by the Israelites, during which they ate nothing leavened. In addition, they cleaned their houses, ridding them of any vestiges of leaven that had accumulated during the year. How fitting is this picture as it illustrates the process that all the Lord's followers are to be engaged in; in other words, the sweeping away of "malice and wickedness," and partaking only of the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."—vs. 8

Paul concludes his lesson by again reminding the brethren at Corinth of their responsibilities and their need to be cautious regarding who they include in their fellowship. The world is full of sin, and although none of the Lord's followers are perfect, nevertheless, each has the responsibility to live as far away from sin as possible, no matter in what form it may come. True discipline of one's self in thought, word, and deed will not only bring about a more complete unity with God on an individual basis, but it will also promote increased unity and spirituality within the church as a whole, as each strives toward the same goal—to be "a vessel unto honour."—II Tim. 2:21

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Presentation to Pharaoh

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

VERSES 1-6 “Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and behold they are in the land of Goshen.

“And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.

“And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers.

“They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen.

“And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee:

“The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.”

Inasmuch as Pharaoh had previously instructed Joseph to send for his father and family, and had even provided wagons in which to help make the journey from Canaan to Egypt, it was fitting that representatives of his people be presented to Pharaoh that he might have an opportunity to make them officially welcome in the land. Having previously instructed his brethren in what to say when questioned by the king, this meeting turned out very satisfactorily.

The “best of the land” was officially assigned to the Hebrew children by Pharaoh, and he requested that if any of Joseph’s family were qualified they should be made rulers over his cattle. In this Pharaoh also acted wisely, for if Joseph’s people were experienced herdsmen, his own cattle

would be much better off in their care than in the care of Egyptians, especially when by nature they despised such an occupation.

VERSES 7-12 “And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. “And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? “And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. “And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. “And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. “And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father’s household, with bread, according to their families.”

Joseph then presented his beloved father, Jacob, to Pharaoh and according to the record, Pharaoh asked Jacob but one question; namely, his age. The patriarch was somewhat apologetic, for while he was then 130 years of age, he evidently felt that he appeared much older. As an explanation he said that his life had been filled with evil: a reference, no doubt, to his many sorrows, beginning when he fled from Esau and including his loss of Joseph over a period of so many years. Yet, in spite of these sorrows, the Lord had blessed him, and now particularly at the end, by permitting him to be reunited with his beloved son, Joseph. While Jacob lived for seventeen years after this, he still came short by twenty-eight years, of living to Abraham’s age.

Jacob “blessed” Pharaoh. We are not to suppose from this that the patriarch performed any special ceremony over Pharaoh. Probably the thought merely is that he wished him well, perhaps even going so far as to express the equivalent of what we have in mind today when we say, “God bless you.” Certainly, under the circumstances, Jacob would feel most kindly toward Pharaoh, and naturally would like to see him prosper, for the patriarch’s own welfare and that of his family were now dependent upon the peace and prosperity of Egypt and her king—at least for the time being.

This might be comparable to the instructions given in the New Testament that we should pray for kings and those in authority that we, as the Lord's people, might prosper spiritually and be at peace. (I Tim. 2:1,2) Throughout all the ages during which the preparatory features of God's plan have been developing, his people have been his special care; and the lives of others have been overruled by him only as they may have had a bearing on the lives of his own people, or in the outworking of his plan. However, this has not always been in order that they might have a tranquil and prosperous life; for the Lord in his wisdom often permits his people, for their testing and development, to have severe trials. Nevertheless he cares for them, both in joy and in sorrow, as was abundantly demonstrated in the experiences he permitted to come to Jacob.

Doubtless, the last years of Jacob and his family in Canaan were rather lean ones, and this may be the reason special emphasis is given to the fact that when they finally were settled in Goshen, it is said that "Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren." When Jacob arrived in Goshen he evidently was quite weak, and, as he thought, ready to die. Actually, however, he lived seventeen years after this, and perhaps it was due partly to the fact that being properly nourished, his ebbing strength was temporarily renewed.

VERSES 13-26 "And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. "And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. "And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. "And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. "And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. "When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and

said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not aught left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: “Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate.

“And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh’s.

“And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof.

“Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands.

“Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land.

“And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones.

“And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh’s servants.

“And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh’s.”

Joseph, in addition to loving God and his own people, was also a loyal servant of Pharaoh, as displayed in this progressive method by which he virtually made slaves, that is, to the central government of Egypt in which Pharaoh ruled supreme. We cannot suppose, however, that Joseph acted with any other motive than was for the best interests of all concerned. Certainly, had it not been that the Lord had revealed to him the facts concerning the seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine, and gave him wisdom to meet the situation, probably most of the Egyptians would have perished. Thus, in reality, they owed their lives to him.

From this standpoint, it may be that we can draw a lesson concerning the manner in which the antitypical Joseph, that is, Christ, will deal with all mankind during the millennium. But first of all, as with Joseph, Christ gives life to his own people, his brethren, the church, providing them with the best—even the ‘High Calling’ of God.

Then, with the church cooperating, the whole world will be provided with the ‘Bread of Life,’ but not unconditionally. No, the world in the next age, even as the Egyptians in Joseph’s time, will eventually have to give up everything and place themselves wholly at the mercy of the Christ in order to secure the ‘Bread of Life’ which the antitypical Joseph will be able to give to them.

VERSES 27-31 “And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.
“And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: for the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.
“And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt:
“But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said.
“And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed’s head.”

Jacob and his family prospered exceedingly in the land of Goshen, and increased rapidly in number. Later, this brought trouble upon them when a new Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph,” came to the throne. (Exod. 1:8) Nevertheless, while Joseph lived, his people were protected, and the Lord’s blessings upon them were manifested, for the most part, in ways of pleasantness.

When he had been in Egypt seventeen years, Jacob realized that he had about reached the end of his life, so he sent for Joseph and secured an oath from him that he would take his body back to Canaan to the burial ground purchased by his grandfather, Abraham. We may understand from this an evidence of Jacob’s belief that his people were not to remain in Egypt forever, but that God would fulfill his promise and give them

the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession—a promise which soon will be fulfilled on a much more grand scale than Jacob probably realized.

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Love in Operation

“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”
—Acts 20:35

SINCE SIN ENTERED into the world approximately six thousand years ago, mankind in general has been governed by the principle of selfishness. The principle of unselfishness, which is Divine love, has not been entirely erased from the human heart; nevertheless selfishness has predominated so fully that the motive of practically all human endeavor has been to acquire rather than to give. In the future thousand-year reign of Christ, this condition will gradually change until finally the Divine rule of unselfishness

will take its proper place in the hearts and lives of all the restored children of Adam.

Before this glorious result of Christ’s kingdom is attained, however, it is the privilege of the followers of the Master now to empty their hearts of unselfishness and to be filled with the Divine quality of love, that thus they may be qualified to share with Christ in the Mediatorial work of his kingdom, by which the Divine image will be replanted in the hearts of men. It is important, therefore, that through the Scriptures we get a proper vision of God and of his love as it is revealed in his plan. It is through the outworking of the Divine purpose toward the children of men that God’s love is revealed and furnishes a perfect pattern which it is the Christian’s privilege to emulate.

GOD IS LOVE

The Scriptures tell us about the glorious attributes of God’s character, but it is only as we see, through the outworking of the Divine plan, the practical application of these attributes in the Creator’s design toward his creatures, that we are able fully to appreciate them. The Bible tells us, for example, that “God is love” (I John 4:8); but we would fail to grasp the full significance of this statement had the Bible not also told us what love

caused God to do—He gave “his only begotten Son” (John 3:16; I John 4:9; John 1:14,18) to die for the people.

Even this revealing statement would not in itself give us a complete understanding of God’s love, except as we see its relationship to the remainder of the Divine plan. Even those things that have been permitted of God, and which many think to be detrimental and evil because of their effects on humanity, will be seen in the light of his fulfilled purposes to be fully in harmony with his character of love.

God had no beginning. “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God,” the prophet declares. (Ps. 90:2) While our finite minds cannot comprehend the full significance of these words, they do reveal that there was a time when he was alone. We are not to understand that Almighty God was lonely in that great eternity before creation. The great Jehovah lacked nothing. He was complete in himself; he needed no companionship to complete or supplement his happiness. But it was his pleasure to create and to bring into being other creatures, that might have joy in living and reflect qualities similar to his own.

Thus we see that the Creator’s unselfishness—love—is revealed even in his creative work. It was not necessary that he create the universe for his own happiness, although we are told that all things have been created for his pleasure. (Rev. 4:11; 14:7) His motive was to share his happiness, although in his great wisdom and foreknowledge he was able to foresee the wreck of the human race that would be produced by sin.

Nevertheless, he proceeded with the creative work. He knew that this wrecking of human hopes and the apparent defeat of righteousness on this planet could be turned into a glorious victory for everlasting human happiness. And even though this victory over sin and death would come through great cost to himself, Jehovah proceeded with his creative purpose in order that throughout the endless ages of eternity countless millions of angels and men could rejoice in the privileges of life extended to them.

GOD’S FIRST CREATION

The Scriptures indicate that God’s first and only direct creation was the *Logos*. The Apostle Paul refers to the *Logos* as “the firstborn of every creature.” (Col. 1:15-18) The psalmist similarly refers to him as Jehovah’s “firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” (Ps. 89:27) Jesus

refers to himself as having had a prehuman existence, saying, “Before Abraham was, I am.”—John 8:13,23,52,58

In John 1:1-3, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott, Interlinear*, we are told that this only begotten Son of God, the Word, was the active agent of Jehovah in all his creative works. The text declares, “All through it was done, and without it was done not even one, that has been done.” These scriptures fully corroborate the statement that the *Logos*, who subsequently became the world’s Redeemer, was, long before, the primary Son of God. He also ranked first in honor, dignity, and station above all other sons of God—not one of whom was like himself—the direct creation of God.

CREATION OF LUCIFER

Among the highest of the angelic beings created by the *Logos* was one called Lucifer. (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19) God foreknew that Lucifer would become a traitor. He knew also that this one who has now become his adversary and the adversary of righteousness, would succeed in inducing the first human pair to transgress his law. But in spite of this foreknowledge of the tragedy that would mar his perfect creation, God proceeded with the creative work.

God did not cause our first parents to sin. They were themselves responsible for wrongdoing and therefore incurred the Divine penalty of death. Thus, through sin, death entered into the world, and now for approximately six thousand years humankind has been traveling through “the valley of the shadow of death.”—Ps. 23:4

God foreknew all this. He foreknew the suffering it would bring upon himself as he viewed the downfall and afflictions of his human creation. He could have avoided it all simply by remaining alone, but was willing that this tragedy should temporarily mar his creation, bringing reproach upon himself, misrepresentation of his name, and sympathetic suffering on behalf of his creatures. (Isa. 63:9) He permitted it so that, in the final outcome of his plan, there would be billions who would spend an eternity in happiness, secure in that, having experienced both evil and good, they had chosen the good.

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

The sentence of death upon our first parents was just. There was no necessity, from the Creator’s standpoint, that anything be done about it,

except to permit the penalty to be carried out and for the human race thus, finally, to go out of existence. But here, Divine love entered into the picture. There was no necessity on God's part to provide a Redeemer for the human race; yet, he did it. He gave his own Son, his only begotten Son, his first and only directly created Son, the treasure of his heart, to be the Redeemer of the lost world.

As we review this wonderful story of Divine love, we discover that the *Logos* also is imbued with the same principles of unselfishness. The Heavenly Father did not force his Son to become the Redeemer of the world. He willingly and gladly did this because, like the Father, he too knew that the greatest cause for happiness is in contributing to the happiness of others.

Concerning Jesus' motive in being willing to come to earth to redeem mankind, the apostle says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [did not meditate a usurpation, Phil. 2:6, *WED*] to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."—Phil. 2: 4-8

A SERVANT OF ALL

The motive of love which prompted the *Logos* to humble himself in coming to earth as a man, continued to be manifest in his activity during the entire period of his earthly ministry. His philosophy is expressed in his words to the disciples: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."—Matt. 20:28

Every act of his consecrated life displayed his consuming zeal for the well-being and happiness of others. Gladly he served the rich and poor alike. He was always ready to serve, regardless of what the service might cost him, either in weariness or in suffering and the loss of reputation. Truly he was moved by that one burning desire—to give.

On one occasion he said to his disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart ... and rest a while." (Mark 6:31) Physical exhaustion prompted this invitation by Jesus; and yet when they endeavored to find a place to rest, we discover that instead of resting he actually taught the multitude, and

toward the close of the day performed one of the most outstanding of his miracles—the feeding of the five thousand.

He had gone to this desert place to rest, but when he found the multitude was waiting for him, his heart was filled with compassion because he saw that they were as sheep without a shepherd. He taught them ‘many things,’ and then gave them temporal food even though he needed rest. There is little doubt, however, that when that day came to a close, Jesus’ heart was filled with a joy unspeakable, greater, perhaps, because he withheld not his strength, but used it for the blessing of these people who were in such great need.

GENTILES SEEK BLESSING

According to the Divine plan, the earthly ministry of Jesus was confined to the Jewish nation. In Matthew 15:24 it is recorded that Jesus said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This statement was made in response to an appeal to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman who had come to him seeking this favor. Jesus told this woman, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” (vs. 26) The woman agreed with this, yet suggested the possibility of Gentile dogs receiving some of the crumbs which might fall from the Master’s table. Jesus was so moved by this demonstration of faith that he said to her, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”

The account tells us that her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matt. 15:28) Here again, Jesus’ wonderful spirit of love is demonstrated. Jesus tried to ignore her because she was a Gentile, but this woman’s faith was so great that Jesus made an exception.

SUBMISSION OF JESUS

Jesus emphasizes the voluntary nature of his ministry on behalf of others in his statement that he had the power or authority to lay down his life and to take it up again. He was voluntarily laying it down that others might be blessed. In Matthew 16:25, the Master explains that this is to be the viewpoint of his followers. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

This latter statement of the Master was made in reply to Peter’s effort to dissuade him from going up to Jerusalem, where Jesus told them he

was to suffer many things and finally be put to death and raised the third day. Peter had rebuked him, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” (Matt. 16:22) Jesus replied to Peter, saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”—vs. 23

Jesus knew what awaited him at Jerusalem. Had he used selfish, human reasoning, he might have avoided this trouble. But it was God’s will that he should suffer and die, and Jesus knew this. He knew, furthermore, that the merit of that sacrifice of his perfect humanity on behalf of the sins of the world was dependent upon its voluntary nature.

This principle of giving and serving is further exemplified by what Jesus said to the rich young man who came to him asking what he should do in order to obtain eternal life. This young man asserted that he had kept the Jewish Law as best he could, but this was not sufficient.

Beyond this, the Master explained, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matt. 19:21) The expression, ‘If thou wilt be perfect,’ does not indicate that the rich man would be morally perfect if he sold all that he had and gave to the poor. The thought evidently is that of the ideal attitude of those who follow the Master.

“WASH ONE ANOTHER’S FEET”

In John 13:4-17 is the account of the Master’s service to his disciples in washing their feet. In Eastern countries where sandals were worn and the feet thus exposed to the sand and dust, feet-washing was a regular and necessary custom. This service was considered very menial, and the humblest servants or slaves performed it for the family and guests. Jesus had noticed among his disciples a spirit of selfishness, having overheard them disputing which of them should be greatest in authority and dignity in the kingdom he had promised to share with them.

The Master had previously taught the disciples the necessity of humility, and that the greatest among them would be the one who served most faithfully. He had reminded them of how the Gentiles lorded it over one another, and of how they sought for honor and position, just as Lucifer did from the time that “iniquity was found” in him. (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:15) But the disciples still had not learned the lesson.

When the Passover Supper was finished, Jesus arose from the table and performed for the disciples this menial service of washing their feet. They had not thought of doing it for one another. They had not yet caught the spirit of the Master, in the sense of realizing that love, as represented in service, was to be the motive of the new order he was introducing. Heretofore, all that the world had known of success and achievement had been based upon the idea that the lesser should serve the greater, and that the greater should lord it over the lesser.

Jesus had invited the disciples to drink the cup and eat the bread which represented participation in his suffering and death. By washing their feet he gave a practical example of what that would mean in their relationship to one another. They were to rejoice in the privilege of even the most humble service. If the Master himself, the one who formerly had been the active agent of God in creating the universe, and now had humbled himself to become the Redeemer, could perform this menial service of washing their feet, should they not also see their privilege of serving one another?

That the lesson had its designed effect we can hardly doubt. We note the course of self-denial followed by the apostles later, and how they served the body of Christ of which they were fellowmembers, following the example of the Head, who was the greatest servant of all.

They now could understand the meaning of our Lord's words to them at the end of his earthly course: "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. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."—John 15:12-14

In what better way could anyone demonstrate love in operation more than this?

The Trial of Your Faith

*“Without faith it is impossible to please him [God].”
—Hebrews 11:6*

TRUE FAITH IN GOD implies more than a belief in his almighty power, for it includes confidence in the rightness of his decisions with respect to every detail of his plan for the whole world, and his will for us as individuals.

When we behold the marvelous works of creation, it is not difficult to believe that the Creator is able to care for us, and to deliver us from evil. But to have confidence in his way and time to deliver is more difficult. It is in this respect that the Lord’s people have had their most severe tests of faith.

FIERY TRIALS

‘Fire’ is used several times in the Bible to illustrate difficult trials which the Lord permits to come into the lives of his people to test their faith and loyalty. The Apostle Peter wrote: “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (I Pet. 4:12) Peter also wrote about the “manifold temptations,” or trials, which come upon the “elect” of this Gospel Age, and explained the reason as being, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:2,6,7

We are given a similar thought in the Old Testament, where we read, “Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly.” (Isa. 33:14,15) These passages do not indicate that the righteous should expect to be delivered from harm. Rather, they are not consumed by the trial.

Peter wrote, “The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and

be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” (I Pet. 3:12-14) Peter, in writing that no one can harm us, says, ‘But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake’ be happy about it, realizing that the Lord permits it for our eternal good and that his presence will be with us in the experience.

UNTO THE END OF THE AGE

The Scriptures reveal that throughout ancient times God used angels frequently as messengers of his presence. We have confidence that this is true. During the Gospel Age, the Heavenly Father has been intimately near to his people through the Holy Spirit, which Jesus likened to a “Comforter.” (John 14:16,17) In his promise to send the Holy Spirit, Jesus added, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world [Greek, *aion*, meaning ‘age’].” (Matt. 28:20) The thought is that Jesus would be present with his people through the medium of the Holy Spirit.

During this harvest period at the end of the Gospel Age, we have the assurance of Jesus’ personal presence with his people, and that he would manifest himself to them by serving “meat in due season” (Ps. 145:15)—rich spiritual food pertaining to the Divine plan of the ages. To those who at this time are spiritually “awake” and hear his “knock,” his promise is that if they will open to him, he will come in and “sup” with them. (Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20) How wonderfully these various expressions convey the idea of the Lord’s nearness to his people in these special days of trial—the ‘evil day’ which was to come upon the whole earth.—Luke 21:35; Eph. 6:13

GOD IS OUR REFUGE

Writing concerning this same time, the psalmist said: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Ps. 46:1) As a ‘present’ help, he is not far away, but actually with us in the flames of trouble to prevent our injury as “new creatures” in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) The “secret of thy [his] presence” is referred to in Psalm 31:20. It is the “secret place of the Most High,” and there we “abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”—Ps. 91:1

The people of the world today do not recognize that we have an unseen partner and caretaker who is tempering the winds and the storms of life that they may not ‘harm’ us; who controls the heat of the fiery trials so

that while the flames may burn the cords which bind us to a world like this, we are not injured, but purified, and made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” the inheritance of exaltation to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.—Col. 1:12; Rev. 20:4

Paul explained that no temptation or trial has befallen us but what is common to man. (I Cor. 10:13) This is more true today than in the days of the Early Church, for at that time many of the saints were especially persecuted. These experiences are also common to man, because of political, economic, national, racial, and other considerations. The human race has freely persecuted one another, or as one writer has described it, “Man’s inhumanity to man has made countless thousands mourn.” Our trials come largely from everyday experiences of life, yet these can be very severe and fiery, and we would certainly be consumed by them were it not that He is with us.

In these common, humdrum experiences of life, our faith is just as much on trial as though we were called upon to face more difficult experiences. Perhaps more so, for in these everyday trifles we are tempted to feel that possibly the Lord may have deserted us. If suddenly confronted with some major test of faith, we would probably realize at once that the Lord’s hand was in it, that he was trying us as gold is tried; but it is not easy to believe that He is with us in the common things of life.

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

Your fiery trial may be those daily chores around the home. You may wish that you could be free and get out into the front line of the Christian battle, where you could witness for the Lord and tell the world about the glories of his kingdom, now so near. You may wonder why the Lord does not arrange things differently for you; but have faith. His wisdom sees that you need to prove faithful by performing the common tasks of life. And remember that he is by your side whether you are in the kitchen, the laundry, or the nursery; and he is there to make sure that this drab life of yours is working in you “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”—Heb. 12:11

Other saints of God may find their trials to be in the office, or the factory, where by Divine providence they find it necessary to spend most of their days. But the Lord’s presence is with these, also. None of his

people need ever to be alone. The only question they need to settle, and to keep settled in their minds and hearts, is that they have not compromised with the forces of evil—that they have refused to bow down to other gods. We may be tempted to bow down to the ‘god’ of gold and the deceitfulness of riches. We are not called upon to worship heathen gods, but we need constantly to guard against the danger of bowing down to gods of our own making—idols which our wayward hearts set up in place of God.

There are the gods of ease, pleasure, pride, and of self. We might conceivably worship our home or our family, and allow them to take the place in our hearts which belongs to our Heavenly Father. We might have special or ‘private’ interpretations of the Bible to which we bow down. It is only by resolutely refusing to bow down to any of these modern ‘gods’ that we demonstrate our faith in the true God—our loving Heavenly Father.

LOYALTY TO GOD

Let us resolve to be loyal to our God—not for reward, but because it is right. If the Lord delivers us from trial, which we know he has the power to do, we will rejoice and endeavor to use the favorable experiences of life to his glory. If he allows us to suffer, regardless of what experiences arise we will know that he is with us, that he has sent his ‘angel’ to protect us from harm. When we reach the end of the way, there will be a fully developed ‘new creature’ exalted to rulership in the kingdom with Christ.

Moses passed through many severe trials, but God’s presence was with him. Joseph was in a ‘fiery furnace’ for many years, but recognized God’s hand in his experiences, so that he did not hold it against his brethren that they had sold him into Egypt. The perfect one, Jesus, endured great “contradiction of sinners against himself.” He was not delivered from the ‘flames’ but was allowed to die the cruel death of the cross. (Matt. 4:11; Heb. 1:14) Stephen boldly preached Christ to the Pharisees, and was stoned to death. He was not delivered, but the Lord was with him in the trial, and he had the faith and grace to ask the Lord to forgive his murderers.—Acts 7:60

So it may be with us. Do some of those with whom you associate vex and try you? Tell the Lord about it. He knows; and they probably do not.

These experiences are the ‘fire’ which is trying you; but the Lord is with you, therefore nothing else should really matter. Are you lying prostrate with disease or pain? The Lord knows that, too, and he is with you in such a ‘fire’ of affliction, and will not permit the flames to injure, but only to refine.

Today we are as exiles in the “present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) Although we are *in* the world, we are not *a part* of it. If we were of the world, the world would love its own; but we are not loved by the world. There are times when the world appreciates the integrity of God’s people, but let us not go the way of the world in order to obtain its favors.

Let us be true to our God, and to his standards of righteousness. Only our faith will enable us to do this, and to gain the victory. Let us not become “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) No matter how fiercely the fires may burn around us, and whatever the local circumstances may be that are feeding the flames that are trying us as gold is tried, let us ever remember the assurance that the Lord is with us, and because he is, we will not be hurt. Regardless of what experiences his wisdom may deem to be best for us, may our faith never waver from the fact that he is with us in the ‘fire’ and that our “light affliction” which is but for a “moment” is working out “for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:17

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