

The Voice of Thanksgiving

*“I will wash mine
hands in
innocency: so will
I compass thine
altar, O LORD: That
I may publish with
the voice of
thanksgiving, and
tell of all thy
wondrous works.”*
—Psalm 26:6,7

IN THE UNITED STATES, Thursday, November 25th will be observed as Thanksgiving Day. It is an occasion on which the people are encouraged to remember and give thanks for the bounties and blessings of life which they enjoy. Certainly it is appropriate that all God's

creatures recognize his goodness, and endeavor in whatever way they can to show their appreciation. It is better to be thankful one day out of the year than not to be thankful at all.

Christians, who have dedicated their lives to follow in the footsteps of Jesus should, above all others, give thanks to God. Every day with them should be an occasion for thanksgiving. Together with all the people, they appropriately give thanks to God for the material blessings of food, raiment, homes, family, and the many other good things of daily life. However, for those who are walking in

the path and after the pattern set forth by the Master, there are blessings of even greater importance and value than those which have to do with their temporal needs.

All should be thankful for the blessings related to the necessities of temporal life. How much more thankful we should be for those divine favors which relate to the necessities of eternal life! One of these spiritual blessings which is of prime importance is the knowledge of God. "This is life eternal," Jesus said, "that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3) A knowledge of God is possible only by knowing his plan, or as our text states, his "wondrous works," and our part in them. To know our part in the plan of God, and our share in his works, means having a knowledge of the manner in which he is dealing with us, as well as an understanding, by faith, of his providences in our lives, whether bitter or sweet.

KNOWLEDGE OF CREATION

To know and believe what the Scriptures say concerning the creative works of God is essential to knowing the Creator himself. In those awe-inspiring works, as outlined in the Book of Genesis, we see displayed God's mighty power, his infinite wisdom, and his boundless love. In the events which followed creation we see God's righteous justice displayed. How thankful we are for this knowledge! How glad indeed we should be that the Lord has given us eyes to discern and hearts to believe what his Word declares to be the truth concerning creation. How wonderful is this knowledge as compared with the unbelief of those whose god is chance.

In the creation of man and God's provision for him we see the purpose of the Creator concerning the human race. Man was made "a little lower than the angels," the Scriptures declare. (Ps. 8:4-8) He was not half human and half angel, or half earthly and half spiritual. He was not put upon the earth to live temporarily, to suffer and to die, with the possibility of enjoying a better existence in some other part of the universe later, or a far worse experience of suffering eternally in a fiery hell. A knowledge of the truth concerning man's creation and the divine purpose for him may seem commonplace, but it is well to remember with thankfulness what it means to us in connection with the complete plan of God through which the Creator's character is revealed. It is a fundamental truth which we should ever "publish with the voice of thanksgiving."

MAN'S FALL

Beautifully simple and understandable is the truth concerning the fall of man. Having been created perfect, and in the image of God, the Creator properly required Adam's obedience. However, he disobeyed, and the penalty of death was pronounced upon him. Here God's justice is revealed. Everything that Adam possessed, including life, was his because of God's goodness. The least he could have done was to manifest his appreciation by obeying the Creator's law, but he failed to do even this. Hence the withdrawal of his blessings by God was just and right. "Unto dust shalt thou return," demonstrates God's justice, and how thankful we should be to have learned that the penalty was not, "Unto eternal torment shalt thou go."—Gen. 2:15-17; 3:16-19

It is a blessed thing to know the truth in its individual facets, but when we recognize that its every detail contributes to our full understanding of God, then our knowledge becomes far more precious. God's justice condemned the race to death, but divine love provided a means of redemption from that penalty. The Creator's love immediately became operative, and he began to make promises of future deliverance. The "seed" of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head. The "seed" of Abraham would bless all the families of the earth. A "King," a "Messiah," a "Prince of Peace," an "Everlasting Father," a "Redeemer," was to be sent. (Gen. 3:14,15; 22:16-18; Ps. 2:4-7; Dan. 9:25,26; Isa. 9:6,7; 59:20) These promises reach a grand climax in the words of the Apostle Peter, who explained that there would come "times of restitution [Greek: restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:20,21) How inspiring it is to "publish" these promises with the "voice of thanksgiving!"

GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

How meaningful also is the knowledge of God's gift of his beloved Son in order that his plan for mankind's restitution might be accomplished! Are we truly thankful for an understanding of the familiar text, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?" May we never lose our appreciation of this "unspeakable gift" of God's love. (John 3:16; II Cor. 9:15) Rather, let us proclaim the great gift of his Son both

outwardly, and in our own hearts, with the “voice of thanksgiving.”

Because Jesus was faithful in laying down his life to redeem the sin-cursed and dying world, God’s great project of restitution is to be accomplished. This is truly a glorious prospect for all people! Has this knowledge given us such a vivid picture of God’s loving interest in the world of mankind that we, in our endeavor to be like him, thrill over the prospects of the restoration of the human race back to favor with God? Indeed, as consecrated followers of our Head, Christ Jesus, we are in training to be dispensers, with him, of the blessings of restitution to the world in the coming Messianic kingdom.

THE HIGH CALLING

Jesus is the world’s Redeemer, even as he is our Redeemer. As Christians, however, he is also our head, our advocate, our high priest, and our future husband and bridegroom. (Eph. 5:23; I John 2:1; Heb. 4:14; II Cor. 11:2) As we think upon these blessed realities, we are reminded of the glorious privilege that is ours of being workers together with God and with Christ in the outworking of the divine purposes and plan. Ours is a heavenly calling, and we have the privilege of running toward the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14

As we think of the various details of God’s loving plan which make it possible for us, as members of the fallen race, to enjoy such a glorious position as partners with him and with Jesus, our “voice of thanksgiving” should know no bounds. With the psalmist, we can say, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” (Ps. 103:1)

The Apostle Paul, likewise, expresses the proper appreciation of divine grace that has been showered upon us: “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”—II Cor. 5:14,15

ACCEPTABLE THROUGH CHRIST’S SACRIFICE

We should never forget what the merit, or value, of Christ’s sacrifice truly means to us. Think of the fact that because of this loving provision God views us as righteous in his sight! Through faith in his shed blood, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and God accepts our best endeavors which come from a pure heart motivation. (Rom. 4:6-8; I John 1:7) Upon this basis we have the privilege of presenting our bodies “a living sacrifice,” no longer dead in sins, with the assurance that they are “holy, acceptable unto God.” This living sacrifice, the apostle explains, is our “reasonable service.” It is the only reasonable way we can properly express our thankfulness for God’s grace.—Rom. 12:1,2

Our text gives us a similar thought. David, who prefigured Christ and the church, said, “I will wash mine hands in innocency.” Jesus was innocent, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) The sins of the fallen race did not contaminate him. Through the merit, represented in his shed blood, the church enjoys the same blessed position of innocency in God’s sight. We should remember, however, that with Jesus as well as with the church,

innocency before God was possible only through faithfulness in the doing of his will. Righteousness in God's sight is never an inactive attitude, but a positive, active, daily obedience to his will. Jesus said, "Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God."—Heb. 10:7

Another thought with respect to our righteousness through Christ is brought out by the Apostle Paul when he writes: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:25-27) It is only as we thus wash that we have a standing of innocency before God and have the privilege of offering sacrifice.

Cleansing ourselves with the "water by the word" calls not only for a study of God's Word, but also the bringing of ourselves into harmony with its righteous requirements. Briefly stated, these requirements are: recognition of and repentance for sin; faith in the shed blood of the Redeemer; full consecration to do God's will; and a daily effort to conform our every thought, word and deed to the standards of righteousness set forth in the Bible.

However, there is more to the Christian life than to wash our "hands in innocency." Our text gives us a further thought, saying, "So will I compass thine altar." The cleansing of our lives by the blood of Christ, along with our best efforts to bring them into line with the righteous requirements of the pure "water" of the Word of God, is the necessary prerequisite to sacrifice, but is not of itself the sacrifice.

OFFERING SACRIFICE

In our text, David associates the altar, symbolic of sacrifice, with the voice of thanksgiving. This indicates that whole-hearted thanksgiving calls for sacrifice. As quoted earlier, Psalm 103:1 presents this viewpoint, saying, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” The expression, “all that is within me,” denotes all our powers and all we possess. Nothing short of this should be considered an adequate thanksgiving offering to the Lord in return for all that he has done for us.

The Apostle Paul expresses a similar thought, saying, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15) Here Paul may have had in mind the statement of Hosea 14:2 where the prophet says, “Return to the LORD. Say to Him, Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.”—*New King James Version*

There are various ways, of course, whereby we can praise God. We can sing hymns of praise, which, without doubt, is pleasing to him. Not a great deal of sacrifice is involved, however, in this form of praise. Nevertheless, it is a delight to raise our voices in songs of praise to the giver of all gifts. We should also express our thanks to God by means of prayer. How blessed to pour out our hearts to him in praise and adoration, telling our Heavenly Father how much we love and appreciate him.

Acceptable sacrifice also includes our service to and on behalf of our brethren in Christ. The Apostle Paul especially commended the brethren at Philippi for their service and sacrifice on his behalf, stating

that such service constituted “fruit” that would abound to their account. Harkening back to the Golden Altar in the Holy of the Tabernacle upon which “sweet incense” was daily offered, the apostle adds that their sacrifice was “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”—Exod. 30:1-8; Phil. 4:15-18

WONDROUS WORKS

In our text David explains that to “publish with the voice of thanksgiving” also involves telling of all God’s “wondrous works.” To do this means to bear witness to the truth. David does not mean that we should tell the Lord about his own works. When offering our prayers, we may at times tell the Lord considerable about his plan. However, he knows all about his own works, and it is not necessary for us to remind him of any feature of it. Nevertheless, it is always in order, and needful, to give expression in prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God for all his wondrous works.—Ps. 89:5; 107:8; 150:2

It is to others that we tell of God’s wondrous works. It is by doing this that we show forth the praises of him who has called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (I Pet. 2:9) What a wonderful privilege it is to tell others of God’s works! Every feature of his plan is a delight to his people, and their joy in the truth increases as they tell it to others. Even when relating it to one another, it becomes more precious, more wonderfully sweet.

There is no better way to “publish with the voice of thanksgiving” and praise God than by laying down our lives in sacrifice, service, and in showing forth his wondrous works. When we consider that all we have

and all we hope for are ours by God's grace, then we will know that our debt of gratitude calls for nothing less than the devoting of our all to him, no longer living unto ourselves, but for him each day.

It is this thought that is expressed by David in these words: "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the [sacrificial] death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant, ... and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people."—Ps. 116:12-18

In yet another psalm we read: "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing." (Ps. 107:21,22) How clearly does David here, as elsewhere, associate thanksgiving with declaring the works of God. This is a very practical arrangement. Had we received special favors from an earthly friend and wanted to show our appreciation by letting others know of his goodness, there would be no better way to do it than to tell of his works, of what he did for us.

How wonderfully God has favored us, and what rich blessings he has bestowed upon us! How grand are the things he has promised yet to do for us, and not only for us, but also for the whole world. To tell of the Heavenly Father's works it is necessary to publish the truth of his plan, because his love calls

forth the expression of our love in return. Thus, Jesus said: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."—Matt. 5:14

THANKFUL FOR TRIALS

As we count our many blessings we should not overlook the trials which the Heavenly Father permits to come into our lives. If we had the choosing of our own experiences we would likely avoid the things which vex and try us. However, God, in his wisdom, sees that we need trials, and in his love permits them. If our wills are wholly resigned to him, then we will express with the "voice of thanksgiving" our appreciation that he is providing all our needs, including our trials, which are so necessary for the rounding out of our Christian characters.

Some of our trials may be permitted by God to test our faith and confidence in him. Others are allowed in order to develop our patience and long-suffering. Still others may be in the nature of discipline or instruction from the Lord. In all cases, they are permitted by our Heavenly Father, who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. Even though these experiences may be very difficult, God allows them because of his love, and our hearts should respond in grateful appreciation for this evidence that he is supplying all our needs.

"In everything give thanks," the apostle exhorts. (I Thess. 5:18) None but truth-enlightened, fully dedicated Christians can do this whole-heartedly. These know that nothing can come into their lives except that which is for their good. (Rom. 8:28) They know that they are the children of a loving

Heavenly Father who is watching over their every interest. They have the assurance that even the minutest affairs of their lives, illustrated by the hairs of their head, are known by him, and directed according to his wisdom and love.—Matt. 10:30

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD,” is a promise which every Christian should apply to himself and believe with all his heart. (Ps. 37:23) If we are truly thankful for the manner in which the Heavenly Father is directing our lives, then we will avoid resisting or going contrary to his will. Instead, with a prayer in our hearts and praise on our lips, we will continue to pay our vows unto him, keeping our sacrifice on the altar until it is wholly consumed.

We have been blessed with the light of the knowledge of God. His “wondrous works”—the glorious doctrine of his plan—has enlightened us. We have a hope not just for ourselves, but for the entire world. We have the assurance of divine care, forgiveness, help, and of instruction and discipline. All of this convinces us of divine love. Assuredly, we understand that he knows and cares, and that “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—Ps. 84:11

Shall we not then respond and “publish with the voice of thanksgiving” God’s glorious character and plan? Let us take to heart the words of Paul: “Be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Eph. 5:18-20 ■