The Great Things of God

"Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you."
—I Samuel 12:24

MANY ADMONITIONS OF the Scriptures encourage God's people to reflect upon the Truth of his Word. The Truth is so reasonable and so wholly in harmony with that which is just, right, and loving that in every way it stands up under the closest scrutiny. In order for error and superstition to prosper, research and reason would need to be suppressed. But all that is in harmony with God, and with Truth and righteousness, will flourish under the full light of investigation and reason. The Scriptures invite the child of God to search and to prove his Word. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD."—Isa. 1:18

As we give thought to the Word of God, and to our Heavenly Father's loving plan for the blessing of his people and the world of mankind during the future kingdom of Christ, we are animated with a desire to serve him diligently and faithfully. Every feature of his plan reflects one or more of the glorious attributes of his character, and reminds us of

the great things he has done, and of all that he will yet do for us. As indicated in our featured text, the LORD had done many wonderful things for Israel, and the Prophet Samuel reminded them of this as a reason why they should express their appreciation to God by being faithful to his law. The same principle holds true with us today. God has richly blessed us in bringing us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (I Pet. 2:9) A proper realization of this should stimulate us to ever increasing effort, not only to know, but to faithfully do, his will.

There are many things which the Christian can consider with profit. It is proper that we give thanks for the everyday blessings we receive of the LORD'S creation. Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." (Matt. 6:28) Again we read, "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" (Luke 12:24) Jesus' wonderful teachings were with a view of learning a lesson of God's care over all of his creative works. The fact that the beauty of the lilies comes to them without their toiling and spinning, teaches us the simple fact that God is abundantly able to provide the necessities of life for all of his Creation without anyone's aid.

The beloved David, a man after God's own heart, received great blessing from his study of the marvelous creative works of God. In one of his psalms he wrote, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

(Ps. 8:3,4) David, whose mind was attuned to the wonderful workings of God, on another occasion wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." (Ps. 19:1,2) By thus considering some of the material creations of God, the prophet gained a great appreciation of earth's Creator, an appreciation which helped to assure him of Divine protection and care in his many times of personal need. This large conception of the Divine character, as the prophet saw it revealed in nature, brought him nearer to God in humility, veneration and love.

The further enlightenment and appreciation of God's loving care for his Creation will also give us greater faith in the outworking of his plans and purposes. This is especially true concerning the calling of his people during the present age. Surely nothing but good can result from a consideration of the lilies, of the sparrows, of the ravens, of the heavens, in the light of God's will for us. These created things of God display his marvelous wisdom, love and power. This exhibit assures those of his New Creation that, being objects of his special care, he is particularly overshadowing us with his love and guiding us by his wisdom. We are assured that, if we continue to follow the leading of his Spirit, he will bring us to glory with his own dear self, as joint-heirs with his beloved Son.—Rom. 8:17

CONSIDERING GOD'S PLAN

Properly considering the material things from which we can learn lessons of Divine wisdom and care, and noting how these lessons apply in the

affairs of our Christian lives, should prepare us for the still greater revelation of God's goodness as set forth in his Word. The Divine plan of reconciliation is contained in his Word. His sympathy for the human race in its fallen condition, and his willingness to assist in man's recovery from sin and death along the lines of justice and love, are also made clear in his Word. We learn that the love of God is revealed through the gift of his Son, and this love at once commends itself to our hearts. We are inspired with a desire to bring our lives fully into harmony with it and with all the principles of righteousness which we see manifested through the further working out of the Father's plan.

The heart that reflects upon God and his Word makes progress by growing in grace, knowledge and love. If we fail to consider the things which have to do with God's hand in our affairs, then we may lose the incentive which will enable us to go forward in the narrow way. How much we lose of Divine grace when we fail to properly study the Word of God and his plan! It suggests that we lack appreciation of him and will be lacking in the necessary zeal to become like him and to serve him faithfully even unto death.

David could learn valuable lessons by considering the heavens. He was richly blessed as he endeavored to bring his life into harmony with the commandments and precepts of the LORD. Yet the precious truths of the High Calling as they are revealed to the saints during this Gospel Age were not made known to him. None of his considerations resulted in giving him an understanding concerning the spiritual phase of the plan of God as we are blessed with it today.

Jesus was asked why he taught the people in parables, and in Matthew's Gospel the account of his answer is recorded. "The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (Matt. 13:10,11) This is most revealing, and the account continues, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—vss. 16,17

How meaningful are the words of the Apostle Paul when he admonished, "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3:1) Many may have considered Jesus from one standpoint or another, and they have accepted him as a great teacher of wisdom and of love, and a man whose life and teachings may be exemplified with profit. But few have accepted him as the 'Apostle and High Priest' of a heavenly order of priesthood which is destined, in keeping with the Divine plan, to be the means of blessing all mankind. Yet this is one of the teachings we are privileged to know during the closing years of this Gospel Age.

Considering Jesus as the great High Priest of the heavenly order of priesthood, we see in him the chosen of God to be our special teacher. He is the one who guides and instructs the church, preparing each of its members to be joint-heirs with him in the glorious future work of the world's blessing and uplifting during Christ's kingdom.

LEST YE BE WEARY AND FAINT

In considering Jesus, we naturally think of his great faithfulness. We note his long-suffering, kindness, sympathy, and love. The consideration of all these things helps us to strive more diligently to be like him, to follow his example more and more as the days come and go, being faithful even unto death. Thus we learn to know and to appreciate more of the glorious qualities of his character.

The Apostle Paul calls our attention to particular points for study in the character of Jesus which should be a great help to us all. He said, "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Heb. 12:3) How easy it may be for us to become weary. The Christian's course is one which runs contrary to the natural cravings of the fallen flesh. It is contrary to the spirit and desire of the world, and to the satanic influences which operate in a sinful world. It will require continual effort on our part to complete our course faithfully.

It is an uphill road that demands a constant energizing of our mind and will in order that we may not become 'wearied and faint' and drop out along the wayside, or lag behind. How appropriate, and what an encouragement it is to consider Jesus, the one who endured such great contradiction of sinners against himself, and the one who walked the uphill road faithfully. He continued in the way of sacrifice until the opposition of sinners finally led to his crucifixion.

Jesus was not persecuted because of his perfection, but rather because the light of Truth radiated from him into the darkness. Darkness hates the

light, and it was not appreciated by those who walked in darkness. Thus they hated the light giver. As we reflect upon this, we realize that to the extent we follow in his steps and let our light shine, we too will experience opposition. By considering him who endured such great contradiction of sinners against himself, it will encourage us to press forward, following in the footsteps of Jesus and emulating him by letting our light shine out. This may be a blessing and encouragement to others, even though it may result in hatred and persecution.

As we consider the great contradiction of sinners against Jesus, we realize that he suffered unjustly, that his suffering was for righteousness' sake, and not because of any unfaithfulness in carrying out the will of the Father. This appreciation may help us to be patient with those who oppose us because of the light which we may radiate. It will help us moreover to be sympathetic because we will realize that, unlike Jesus, we are not perfect, and that many times because of our imperfections we may have cause for discouragement. Even though we do the best we can, we often come far short of the perfect standard of righteousness which was exemplified in our Lord's earthly ministry. It behooves us to be patient and sympathetic even with those who may manifest themselves to be our enemies.

VALUE OF TRIALS

As we consider Jesus from the standpoint of the opposition which he endured because of his faithfulness to Divine Truth, we are reminded of the apostle's statement concerning him. "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in

bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) We learn the value of trials, and by his faithful endurance of trial Jesus was prepared for the high position which he now occupies in the Divine plan. Thinking upon this carefully helps us to realize what the Scriptures declare, namely that experiences and testings are necessary for all of the Lord's people, even as they were essential for Jesus. We realize, too, that if we receive trying experiences as we should, being rightly exercised thereby, they will work out for us an everlasting blessing which will redound to the glory of God.

The apostle also reminds us of our responsibilities toward the brethren saying, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (Heb. 10:24) How much the Lord's people need to remember this injunction to 'consider one another,' if they would have sympathetic forbearance and love toward the brethren. This understanding of each other, as we walk together in the narrow way, will remind us that our brethren are endeavoring to offer their lives in sacrifice even as we are offering ours. It will impress upon us that we are imperfect and need God's mercy through the merit of Jesus' shed blood. They are imperfect and are being dealt with upon the same basis. Therefore, we should be merciful toward our brethren even as we desire that they should be merciful toward us.

Having consideration for others means to think kindly and charitably of them, despite the blemishes which cannot be hidden. These blemishes are not to be held against the brethren, but we are to remember that they are attempting to please God, and

that in their hearts they are striving to do his will, even as we also are endeavoring to do. As we consider our brethren from this standpoint, their unwilling imperfections of the flesh will not cause us to speak evil against them, nor to slander them. It will enable us to be more sympathetic and to encourage and to do all we can for them, even to the laying down of our lives for them.

FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED

Another point which we do well to consider in connection with our relationship to God is the abundant manner in which we have received blessings from him, blessings of the Truth which have enlightened our hearts, and have revealed to us the glorious attributes of his character. This Truth has pointed us to Jesus as the bread of life, and has satisfied our longings as nothing else could do. These gracious gifts of God to us have brought joy, peace and hope into our lives. We are reminded of the Master's words, "Freely ye have received, freely give."—Matt. 10:8

How freely we have received of God's blessings, and look back to Jesus to note the manner in which he expressed his love to the Father and his interest in his fellowmen. We find that he was like his Father in that he continually gave. He gave to his disciples, and to all men as he had opportunity. He gave instructions to his followers and to others, as well as many other blessings of physical and mental healing, performing miracles oftentimes to do so. What a wonderful lesson there is for us in Jesus' miracles of feeding the five thousand and the four thousand with such small portions of fish and bread.

There is a lesson for us at the present time as we consider the manifestation of the Master's good will toward those of his day who were seeking his blessings. How often we may feel that the work is great, and that the means at our disposal for reaching those who may be searching for the Truth is limited. We may feel that our means are too limited, and too insignificant to accomplish anything worthwhile in the service of the Lord.

Even though we may have the Truth, and have a wonderful message to tell the people, human frailty and shortsighted vision may make us feel that there is no way in which it can be adequately given out. However, the Lord can wonderfully bless the humblest efforts, and multiply the effect of the light as it proceeds from the faithful. The Lord has promised to bless our efforts if we do what we can to give forth the message of Truth. It is important in this connection to realize that there are those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and there are those who need this food which we have to give. We are to consider that in this Gospel Age it is not expected that we shall convert the world, but that only those can be reached who have an ear to hear. We are to do the best we can to tell the good tidings, to give to all the glad message of the kingdom in any and every way we can, whenever and wherever there is opportunity.

Further, we are reminded that Jesus not only provided temporal food for the multitude centuries ago, but now, according to his promise, he has come forth the second time and is dispensing spiritual food, meat in due season, things new and old from the storehouse of his Word. Considering this, let us

rejoice that we have been so highly favored with the honor of sitting at the Lord's table during this harvest period to partake of the bread of life which he has so abundantly dispensed to the household of faith. Let us also be swift to appropriate these promises to our own hearts and apply them in our lives.

TRUSTING IN THE LORD

While we know that God will care for our earthly needs, supplying them according to his wisdom, we are to consider that even more important than this is his care over us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. No matter how fiery the trial, or how difficult the way, we should learn to put our trust in him. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (I Pet. 5:7) This doesn't mean that we are to be listless or indifferent to our experiences. When we do the best we can, and when we are faithful in bearing witness to the Truth and seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, God will take care of the situation and cause all things to work together for our good. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:28

As the Lord's people, considering our place in the Divine plan and God's wonderful care over us, we should remember that we are not to expect him to guide our efforts according to our own wisdom. We are not to expect him to bless our plans, or ask him to see to it that our wills are done. Proper consideration of God and his will should lead to a careful scrutiny of his Word that we may know more and more clearly as the days go by what his will is for

us. Let him guide us in his way, and help us to do the things which he has asked us to do. Approaching the matter from this standpoint, we can have full confidence that he will care for us by giving us wisdom, discernment, strength and patience to carry on faithfully.

This does not mean that we will be released from trial or that we will be spared suffering or persecution, and that our way will be strewn with roses. It does mean that regardless of the experiences through which we are required to pass, we can apply to our hearts the blessed balm of consolation made up of the assurances of his Word. These promises guarantee to us sufficient measure of his wisdom and strength to care for us in every emergency, and in every time of need. The more we consider, the more aware we become of the wonderful and gracious things the Lord has done for us. His blessings to natural Israel were rich, and it was appropriate that Samuel should call upon the Israelites to respond in appreciation and thanksgiving by a course of wholehearted obedience to God's laws of righteousness. But how much more bountiful have been God's gifts to us, and how much more responsibility is placed upon us. We are to respond to God's blessing with all that we are, all that we have, and with all that we hope to be.

God has blessed us richly, and the more we realize what he has done for us, the more we should be determined to give all to him. In the outworking of his great plan, we realize that our course of faithfulness in responding with the sacrifice of everything that we have will result in still further gifts from him. If we are faithful to our High Calling,

these future blessings will include the gift of the Divine nature. This will mean glory, honor, and im-mortality, and the privilege of joint-heirship with Jesus in his kingdom. It will also include the ines-timable privilege of becoming a member of God's own family and enjoying his fellowship. We rejoice in the prospect of being with him throughout eter-nity and of cooperating with him and with Jesus in all the wonderful works of the ages to come. ■