Be Thankful

"We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." —II Thessalonians 2:13

THE THREE HUNDRED MIL-lion people of the United States of America will celebrate the national Thanksgiving Day holiday this year on Thursday, November 27th. It has been set aside by presidential proclamation for most workers, and special services of thanksgiving will be held in many churches across the country to celebrate the occasion. Some will observe the day with the true spirit of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father for their many blessings. Others will take the opportunity to gather with family and friends with little thought given to the Lord—the giver of every good and perfect gift to his earthly creation.

TIME FOR REFLECTION

A little flock of Christian people and those who truly love and desire to serve our Lord, count every day as one of thanksgiving for the abundant blessings they receive from him. They have been specially

called by our Heavenly Father during this present Gospel Age to become members of the bride of Christ Jesus. In his epistle to the brethren at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul addressed this special relationship, when he wrote, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Thess. 2:14) One of the grandest gifts ever offered to anyone since the creation of the world is the High Calling in Christ Jesus that has been extended during this age. Those who respond to this calling are indeed richly blessed for which they are truly thankful. We believe that it is essential to express our thanks to God every day of the year.

The apostle encourages this class of specially called followers of our Lord Jesus by saying, "Brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."—vss. 15-17

ULTIMATE BLESSINGS

Considering the wonderful blessing that we have received from the Heavenly Father, we turn to Paul's words which were written to the Hebrew brethren who were also responding to the High Calling in Christ Jesus. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3:1) This has been made possible through our faith in the precious blood and merit

of our Lord Jesus that was offered on behalf of his followers during the present Gospel Age—"Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."—chap. 9:24

The merit of Christ's sacrifice that was presented to the Heavenly Father will be made available for the entire human family who must be obedient to the laws of Christ's future kingdom. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:16) The good shepherd shed his lifeblood as a ransom price on behalf of all his sheep. This includes the little flock of faithful followers who are being called during this age, and then the larger flock of humanity who will respond to his voice under the terms of the New Covenant during the kingdom of Christ. During that blessed time, all hearts will be glad to give thanks and praise to our loving God.

THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS

When speaking of giving praise and thanksgiving to God, the Apostle Paul says that it is the fruit of our lips and a manifestation of Christian character. "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) Our 'lips' are used as a symbol of speech and communication with others. We communicate and make known the glorious Truth by using our lips in this manner. Those who have a hearing ear will respond to the words spoken. When going to our loving

Heavenly Father, we pour out our love and thanksgiving directly to him. This may be spoken with our lips, or inaudibly expressed in our hearts.

We are thankful for whatever measure of spiritual or temporal blessings that we may have because of God's wonderful and loving providence towards us. As footstep followers of our Lord Jesus, we are privileged to have the eyes of our understanding opened to behold the wondrous beauties of the Truth. We trust also in the blessed assurance that God's love will ultimately be manifest to the poor groaning creation in due time. In prophetic words, Hosea spoke of a time when all men would render thanks and praise to God. "Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." (Hos. 14:2) The psalmist also wrote, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD."—Ps. 150:6

CONTINUAL THANKSGIVING

The faithful followers of the Master are encouraged to have a consuming zeal in all that they do in the service of God, and to render their heartfelt praise and thankfulness to him continually. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6) "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:9) "Ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing." (II Thess. 3:13)

We should always be on the alert to do those things for our brethren that would be for their highest spiritual welfare. "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."—I Thess. 5:18

FORGET NOT HIS BENEFITS

The Psalmist David wrote, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."—Ps. 103:1-5

These wonderful words express the depth of love, praise, and thanksgiving that David had for our loving Heavenly Father. The word 'bless' in the psalmist's expression 'Bless the LORD' includes the thought of kneeling down as an act of adoration [*Strong's Bible Concordance*, Old Testament #1288]. David is thus stressing the appropriateness of kneeling before the Heavenly Father when offering our prayer and thanksgiving. Assuming this humble posture when before the Father is wise counsel and encouragement to all of Jesus' faithful followers to do likewise.

Perhaps David's expression is meant to be prophetic of the true class of Jesus' consecrated followers during this harvest period and closing years of the present Gospel Age. While we thus bless the Lord, let us consider the psalmist's suggestion to 'forget not all his benefits.' And again, we read, "O

come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."—Ps. 95:6,7

OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD

We are dependent upon our Heavenly Father for all things that pertain to our consecrated walk in newness of life, both temporal and spiritual. In reference to the Lord's people, we read, "They should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."—Acts 17:27,28

God extends to us the temporal blessings of life such as sunshine and rain, as well as food, raiment and shelter. We also receive spiritual food that is necessary for our growth and development in the narrow way. He provides the Holy Spirit of power and of a sound mind for the consecrated class of Christians. As New Creatures in Christ Jesus, our sins and trespasses are covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness. If we sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" who will intercede on our behalf.—I John 2:1

THE CHASTENING ROD

One of the things that we should be very thankful for is that, when it is necessary, our loving Heavenly Father will discipline our misbehavior, and will send chastening experiences for our correction in righteousness. The Apostle Paul explains this very special relationship in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation

which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"—Heb. 12:5-7

As New Creatures in Christ Jesus, our hopes, aims, and ambitions no longer appeal to the flesh. This is the outward man that is corrupting day by day. The spiritual growth of the new man is being developed by the providential care and keeping of our loving God. The scriptures explain this work of the Holy Spirit of God on our behalf. "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Cor. 4:15-18

SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION

We should be ready always to give thanks to God for providing us with Jesus' sacrifice as a ransom price for our sins. "He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:2) We were born into this world to suffer the same sentence of death as all others. David again wrote, "I waited patiently

for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD."—Ps. 40:1-3

The God of all mercy and grace is permitting his consecrated people to endure difficult trials and besetments as they walk in newness of life and sacrifice their human flesh in the service of the Truth. We understand that these experiences are necessary for the New Creature to be a joint-heir with Christ Jesus in the administration of his kingdom. These hardships of the narrow way prove and test their loyalty to the Heavenly Father. They are necessary to consume the dross of the old fleshly nature and to establish in their hearts the character likeness of their Lord. Even while undergoing these trying experiences, they have much to be thankful for. In spite of it all, they live a richer, fuller, and more satisfying life than the most successful and contented people of the world.

OUR LIVELY HOPE

By the Lord's unlimited grace, we have a true and lasting hope in this present world of confusion and chaos. The Apostle Peter spoke of this as a "lively hope." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven

for you [for us, *Marginal Translation*], Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 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: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."—I Pet. 1:3-9

Our Heavenly Father has taken us into his own confidence and has revealed his ultimate plan and purpose for the restoration and reconciliation of the poor groaning creation. We are especially thankful to know that he is presently selecting from among the fallen world of mankind a group of faithful followers of his Son, our Lord Jesus, to be the kings and priests in his millennial kingdom which we believe is drawing ever nearer.

A FAMINE FOR TRUTH

During the closing years of this present Gospel Age, the poor, groaning, human creation continue to put their trust in political leaders and statesmen who speak of peace and brighter days on the horizon. Their spiritual leaders likewise have no satisfying answers, nor messages of comfort to give them. The world has been passing through the prophetic 'troubled waters' of a corrupt and dying society which has been largely based on

human selfishness and pride. They long for a better time and day while ignorant of the nearness of Christ's promised kingdom of Truth, peace, and security that will be administered under his control.

God's prophet spoke of the famine for Truth that would accompany the end of this age. "The days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst."—Amos 8:11-13

A FEAST OF TRUTH

Divine power is being exercised on behalf of all those who hunger and thirst for Truth and righteousness. We read of our Heavenly Father's loving care on behalf of his consecrated people, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Ps. 103:5) "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." (Ps. 107:9) During the closing years of this present Gospel Age when we believe that our dear Lord is present, we have been sumptuously fed and watered with the refreshing and soul-satisfying portion of the riches of God's wonderful Word and promises. "The LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."—Isa. 58:11

ENLIGHTENED WITH TRUTH

This knowledge is refreshing to those of us who are now living during this time, and we take new courage and hope as we see this present evil world passing away. It gladdens our hearts even as we see the present distress of nations. Darkness will give way to the glorious kingdom of light that will be ushered in to bring blessings to all the families of the earth at that time. All men will be enlightened by the true light of Christ's kingdom during that blessed time.

The Prophet Joel spoke of God's promise to give the world his Holy Spirit at that time, saying, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."—Joel 2:28

GLAD TIDINGS COMING

The human family will have to wait a little longer for the promised Spirit of God. That will not be available until the consecrated class of Jesus' followers has been completed. At that time, man will benefit from the blessings promised under Christ's kingdom, and the earthly creation will voice their praise and thanksgiving unto our loving God for his ultimate plan and purpose to bless his human creation.

At that time, the New Covenant will be operational and the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh, as indicated in the wonderful words of Joel's prophecy. At that future time, the world's people will be lifted up from the miry pit of sin and

death that marks our present world. "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."—Isa. 35:8

RENDERING OUR THANKS

We are thankful that the United States government has wisely set aside a special day each year to render thanksgiving and praise to God. It is a reminder of our humble position as we stand in awe before the great Creator of our world and the entire universe. Our lives should be full of heartfelt thanks every day of the year for the countless blessings that we receive from our loving Heavenly Father.

We thank him for our freedom in living in a society where we are able to take advantage of the many privileges to seek understanding and grace, and to grow in the knowledge of truth, righteousness, and peace.

Thanks be unto our loving Heavenly Father for delivering us out of the realms of darkness, ignorance, and superstition, and to grant us the manifold blessings of enlightenment and peace. May we praise him for calling us to be members of the bride of Christ and granting us the unspeakable joy of joint-heirship with his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the future administration of his righteous kingdom. ■

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.—Proverbs 3:6