A Time for Thanksgiving

"That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works."
—Psalm 26:7

THE THANKSGIVING HOL- iday is a time for people to remember and give thanks to God for the blessings they have enjoyed at his hands during the past year. It is appropriate that all of 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 to not be thankful at all. This year, in the United States, Thanksgiving Day occurs on Thursday, November 23rd.

Christians consecrated to follow in the footsteps of Jesus should, above all others, give thanks to God. Every day with them should be a time for thanksgiving. They should be glad to have their privilege of giving thanks brought especially to their attention by this national observance of Thanksgiving Day. Together with all the people, Christians appropriately give thanks to God for their material blessings of food, raiment, homes in which to live and many other blessings. All should be thankful for

temporal blessings, for they are the necessities of everyday life.

For those who are walking in the way of sacrifice with Jesus, however, there are blessings of far greater importance than those which have to do with our temporal needs.

How much more thankful should we be for the Divine favors which are the necessities of our spiritual and eternal life. If we were to single out any one of these spiritual blessings as being more important than another, perhaps it would be the knowledge of God. Jesus said, "This is life eternal, 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 and, as our featured text states, his 'wondrous works,' and our part in that plan. 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, and a faith understanding of his providence in our lives, whether it be bitter or sweet.

To know and believe what the Scriptures say concerning the creative works of God is essential to knowing God himself. In those creative works as outlined in 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 justice displayed. How truly 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 when compared with the unbelief of others.

In the creation of man and God's provision for him, we see the purpose of the Creator concerning the human family. Man was made "a little lower than the angels" as the Scriptures declare. (Ps. 8:4-8) He was not put here 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 true knowledge concerning man's creation, and the Divine purpose for him, is well to remember with thankfulness. It means the complete plan of God, through which the Creator's character is revealed to us. It is a fundamental truth which we should ever remember with much appreciation.

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 demanded absolute obedience. Man disobeyed, and the penalty of death was pronounced upon him. Here God's justice is revealed. Everything that Adam possessed, including his life, was his because of God's goodness. He was expected to manifest his appreciation by obeying the Creator's law, but he failed. Hence the withdrawal of his blessings by God was a just and right punishment. The Divine sentence was, "Unto dust shalt thou return."—Gen. 3:19

It is a great blessing to know the Truth, but when we recognize that every feature contributes to our acquaintance with God, our knowledge then becomes far more blessed. God's justice condemned the race to death, but his love provided a way of escape from that penalty. His love became operative and he began to make promises of future deliverance. The "seed" of the woman was to "bruise" the serpent's

head. (Gen. 3:15) The "seed" of Abraham was to bless all the families of the earth.—chap. 22:15-18

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

How wonderfully this Divine provision highlights the scriptural portrait of God. How meaningful is this knowledge in the light of God's gift of his Beloved Son in order that his plan for recovery might be accomplished in harmony with his will. We should be 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." (John 3:16) Our hearts should be full of love and appreciation for the wonderful gift of Jesus, even as the Apostle Paul proclaimed, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."—II Cor. 9:15

The Logos (Jesus in his prehuman existence) was made flesh for the suffering of death, and, because he was faithful in laying down his life to redeem the sin-cursed and dying world, God's great plan of recovery for the human family will be accomplished. What a glorious prospect for the world. The knowledge of Truth gives us a vivid picture of God's interest in the world of mankind. We are truly thankful for the prospects of restitution blessings for the poor groaning creation.

Jesus is the world's Redeemer, even as he is our Redeemer, Head, and future Bridegroom. When we contemplate these blessed realities, we are thankful for the glorious privilege that is ours of being workers together with God in the outworking of the Divine Plan of the Ages. We are called to a heavenly reward and we have the privilege of running "for the

prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:14

The various details of the LORD's loving plan make it possible for us, as members of the fallen race, to enjoy such an exalted position as partners with him and with our Lord Jesus. Our thankfulness should know no bounds, and nothing should be held back in the expression of our appreciation for his loving-kindness. We should be thankful every day of the year, and everything which we have and are should be put into our giving of thanks.—Ps. 103:1

The Divine grace, which makes it possible for us to be servants of God, is great cause for giving thanks. That grace is manifested through God's unspeakable gift, the gift of his Son to be our Redeemer and Advocate. The proper appreciative viewpoint of this is expressed by Paul when he wrote, "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

RECKONED PERFECT

We should never forget what the merit of Christ's sacrifice really means to us. Because of this loving provision, God views us as though we were perfect. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and God accepts our best endeavors as though they were perfect endeavors. Upon the basis of this provision, we have the privilege of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, no longer dead in trespasses and sins, and with the assurance that they are holy and acceptable to God. This, the apostle explains, is our

"reasonable service," the only reasonable way we can properly express our thankfulness for God's grace.—Rom. 12:1,2

David, who was a type of Christ, said, "I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD." (Ps. 26:6) Jesus was innocent, "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." (Heb. 7:26) The sin of the fallen race did not contaminate him, and he was not responsible for it. Through his merit, the church enjoys the same blessed position of innocency. However, we should remember that with Jesus, as well as with the church, innocency before God was possible only through faithfulness in the doing of the Father's will. Righteousness in God's sight is a positive, active obedience to his will. This is in harmony with our Lord's desire to serve God. "Then said I, Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God."—Heb. 10:7

The language of this text takes our minds into the court which surrounded the typical Tabernacle, where were located both the brazen altar and the laver of water. The priests washed at the laver which foreshadowed our "washing of water by the word." (Eph. 5:26) It is only as we wash that we have a standing of innocency before the Lord and have the privilege of offering sacrifice. Cleansing ourselves by the water of the Word calls not only for a study of the Word, but the bringing of ourselves into harmony with its righteous requirements. 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 high standards of righteousness set forth in God's Word.

There is more to the Christian life than to wash our hands in innocency. The cleansing of our lives by the blood of Christ, and our best efforts to bring ourselves into line with the righteous requirements of the Word of God, is the necessary prerequisite to sacrifice.

David associates the altar, symbolic of sacrifice, with the voice of thanksgiving. This indicates that wholehearted thanksgiving calls for sacrifice. The psalmist presents this viewpoint saying, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." (Ps. 103:1) The expression, "all that is within me," denotes all of our powers and all that 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) The thought is that true Christian thanksgiving involves sacrifice as foreshadowed by the typical sacrifices of the Tabernacle.

There are various ways whereby we can praise God. We can sing hymns of praise. It is a delight to raise our voices in songs of praise to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. However, there is little effort of sacrifice involved. 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 him how much we love and appreciate

him. Such incense of praise is a sweet-smelling savor to our Heavenly Father. It is this form of praise that is pictured more particularly by the offering of incense at the golden altar in the Holy of the Tabernacle.

We should remember that the fire that burned the incense at the golden altar was brought by the priest from the brazen altar out in the court. If the fires of sacrifice were not burning on this altar there could be no burning of incense at the golden altar. The one depended upon the other. While prayer, adoration, and praise are the most direct offerings of incense to the LORD, he has so arranged matters that we cannot offer these sincerely and acceptably except as we have the proper spirit. To do this means to bear witness to the Truth.

It is to others that we tell of God's wondrous works, and in doing this that we show forth the praises of him who hath called us "out of darkness into his marvelous light." Peter said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people [purchased people, *Marginal Translation*]; that ye should shew forth the praises [virtues, *MT*] of him who hath called you 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. When relating these precious things to one another, it becomes more precious and more wonderfully sweet. There is no better way to live a true life of thanksgiving and praise to God than to show forth his virtues. All we have, and all we hope for, are ours by God's grace. Our debt of gratitude calls for nothing less than the devoting of our all to him.

It is this thought that is expressed by David when he said, "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 death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am thy servant; 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

The psalmist again calls upon us to remember the LORD's goodness with thanksgiving, saying, "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 the LORD.

How wonderfully the LORD has favored us with rich blessings. 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 all his works it is necessary to publish the Truth of his plan and purpose. Thus it is that in appreciation of what God has done for us, his people become "the light of the world. A city that is set on an 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 has permitted to come into our lives. If we had the choosing of our own experiences we would avoid the

things which try us. But 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 be thankful that he is providing all our needs, even trials that 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, while others may be permitted to develop our patience and long-suffering. At times, they may be in the nature of chastening from the LORD. In any case, they are permitted by our Heavenly Father who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. Even though he may discipline us, our hearts should respond in grateful appreciation for this evidence that he is supplying all our needs. "In every thing give thanks," the apostle exhorts. (I Thess. 5:18) None but Truth-enlightened consecrated Christians can do this wholeheartedly. 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 smallest affairs of their lives are known by him and directed according to his wisdom and love.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way" (Ps. 37:23) is a promise which every Christian should apply to himself. If we are truly thankful for the manner in which the LORD is directing our lives, then we will not resist nor go contrary to his will. Instead, with a prayer in our hearts and a song on our lips, we will continue to pay our vows unto him, keeping our sacrifice on the altar until it is wholly consumed.

"He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold," said Job. (Job 23:10) God knows the way we take, and he is trying us as gold is tried. This means that he puts us through the fires of affliction that the gold of our character might be refined. How precious the thought that the Great Refiner tempers the heat, and will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. If he sees that the heat is becoming so intense that we are liable to be injured, he provides a way of escape. (I Cor. 10:13) May this blessed truth become so thoroughly fixed in our minds and hearts that nothing will be able to disturb our inner peace and rest in him and in his promises. "The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."—Ps. 84:11 ■