



“WHAT SHALL I RENDER UNTO THE LORD?”

(A New Year Meditation)

When we come to the end of a year, we begin to look back and we ask what we may render unto the Lord for all of His blessings to us. Surely, with the psalmist we gladly take up again our Lord's gracious cup of salvation, we call upon His name, and pay our vows unto the Lord, to each other, in the presence of all of His people. At each New Year we look back over the year of His keeping power and we look ahead to see what we might do in the New Year that would bring glory and honour and be more pleasing to our Heavenly Father and to our Lord Jesus, who bought us with His precious blood.. At New Year we may also reflect on how close we are sometimes to God's Kingdom.

Each year brings many changes in the world in which we live, in social, political, religious and financial spheres. None of us is immune from the effects and flow-ons of these changes. How have these changes affected us as the Lord's people? Have they been such experiences as to draw us closer to our Heavenly Father to the extent that He would be pleased with our progress? Have these changes made us more trustful, more zealous in the doing of God's will, or have they made us more fretful, unkind or even angry? Or have they, rather, moved us to reflect more on His rich benefits to each one of us and to remember that in all our affairs our Heavenly Father is still there, our dear Lord is still there, and that if we sin, we still have an Advocate with the Father

So, let us look briefly at Psalm 116, verses 12-14. The Psalmist asks himself and us a definite question - "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" He doesn't say, 'what shall I render unto the Lord for someone else's benefits or how have their benefits benefited me?' In Psalm 16 we are reminded that we are God's inheritance, meaning that we have a portion with everything that God has provided for His people. As God's children we are, along with our Lord and Master, Jesus, the inheritors of all God's wonderful blessings. We read of this in Romans 8:16,17, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are

the children of God', and, if children, then heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ".

What then shall you and I render? What shall we give back, for all of God's benefits? In Psalm 103:2, we read: "Forget not all of God's benefits". Now if all of us would write down all of the benefits of just one day we wouldn't even begin to scratch the surface of all that Almighty God has done for us. Yet before we close our eyes and go to sleep at night, we should remember God's benefits and how He has overruled in our daily affairs. Going on in Psalm 103, we read of just some of God's benefits. God, first of all, **forgiveth all our iniquities..** How we fall on our knees and thank our Heavenly Father for this and for our Lord Jesus and the covering robe of His righteousness. If God did not forgive our mistakes, surely all would be lost. "For thou, O Lord, art good and ready at all times to forgive, abundant in loving kindness unto all those that call upon Thee." (Psa 86:5).

Secondly **He healeth all our diseases**. Now this Scripture does not mean that God will heal all our physical problems but that God watches over us in our spiritual walk. When we make mistakes sometimes He sees it necessary to chastise us but He does it gently, and He does it to bring us back into a position that He can be proud of. Through the aid of the Holy Spirit, we are brought through these experiences and we are healed, that is, we are made whole. Thirdly, **God has provided a Ransom for us.** How wonderful that ransom and all that it entails is! Fourthly, **He crowneth**

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us with loving kindness and tender mercies. We receive God's favour, we receive His kindness, every day and over and over again.

Fifthly **He satisfies our every desire.** No, He doesn't give us everything we want of an earthly nature or sense but He gives us everything good for our spiritual walk. As we consider our Almighty God and His compassion for us, how well have we done in developing compassion for others? This word brings in a God of mercy. How merciful, how considerate have we been this past year~ God, we know, is a God of mercy. In Matthew 5:7, we read: 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.' If we are not merciful, we shall not obtain mercy from God. Matthew 6:14,15 tell us more on this point. How patient have we been in our dealings with our brethren? How patient have we been with those that we come in contact with in the world? The American Standard Version of I Thess 5:14 says: "Be long suffering towards all."

One of the most beautiful Psalms is Psalm 37. In it, we can see how we can make vows for the New Year, and how we might keep those vows through the year. First, we will vow to **develop more trust** in God regardless of how things may go with us or for us. Psalm 37:3, says 'Trust in God and do good'. That is a vow that all of us can take to heart. To have full and complete trust in Almighty God will relieve us from any fear of what may come. World events can be very distressing and disturbing, but the Lord's people need not fear what man shall do to them. They trust in Almighty God, and seek to do good to all (as Galatians 6:10 tells us) but especially to the household of faith. Psalm 37:5 says "Commit thy way unto the Lord, 'trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass'." To trust is to be confident, to trust is to be sure that God will be at our side at all times because He is our security and in Him we can have full assurance.

We must desire to have **more fellowship** with God and with our Lord Jesus and with all of our dear brethren. We can do this through study of His word, and then by applying His word daily in our lives. 2 Timothy 2:15 reads "Give diligence to present yourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." Our fellowship is mentioned in Heb 10:24,25 "Let us consider one another to incite unto love and to good works, not forsaking our assembling together as the custom of some is." Every meeting of God's people should be an opportunity to incite one another unto love and good works. Sometimes we may fall short, caught up in other outside arrangements. Fellowship is so vital for each one, let us cherish every opportunity!

In this context, we should always make a vow to the

Lord to be **gracious to one another** for Psalm 112:5, says: "Well it is that man deals graciously for he will maintain his cause in judgment." This means that we must stoop down in favour to all of our brethren, always wishing good for them from our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. As we do this we can and should become peacemakers. Matthew 5:9, puts it this way: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be the Sons of God." Where we go, wherever we go, peace should follow.

How important to all the Lord's people are the words of Psa 19:12-14, as each makes his or her fresh vow **to be as upright as we can** in every way in all we do in the year ahead! "*Who can discern his errors? Cleanse thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me, for then shall I be upright and I shall be clear from transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O God, my Rock and my Redeemer*" May the coming year be the best year of our spiritual lives so far! (CC: adapted)

God is All-Sufficient

Resting on His promises, what have we to fear?

God is all-sufficient for the coming year.
Onward then and fear not, children of the day;
For His word shall never, never pass away.
(FRH)

SEASON'S GREETINGS!

Our thoughts again with Christmas here,
Turn to our loved ones far and near
Turn to God's greatest Gift to man,
The very centre of His plan.

In that provision we rejoice
With thankful heart we lift our voice,
And pray that He will haste that day
His reign on earth shall hold full sway.

Christian Greetings Christmas Cheer,
May God bless you thru the year;
With Best Wishes, more Sincere,
Happy Christmas, Glad New Year.

(Martin C. Mitchell)

“THE LAST DAYS & THE LAST DAY”

The two expressions "the last day" and "the last days" occur a number of times in the New Testament, day and days being translated from the Greek words *hemera* (singular) and *hemerai* (plural). The two expressions sound very similar but speak of totally different time periods and it is important to understand the distinction. By listing the singular and plural forms separately, Young's Concordance highlights the different usages. Both terms imply the completion of something. If we have the last of anything, it means that there is no more of it. In the present case, it does not mean that there will be no more days at all, for God has assured us that the earth abides forever; but it does mean that there will be no more of those particular kinds of days.

This expression "the last days" applies mainly to the end of our (gospel) age, the days in which we are now living and those immediately ahead of us, the last days of this unrighteous order of things, the last days of Satan's empire, the last days of the permission of evil. God has promised that there will be no more of these days. When they are over, He will usher in the long awaited kingdom, the times of Restitution, the start of the "last day" (singular). This last day we understand from the scriptures to be a one thousand year day, the time when Christ and His Church will reign to assist all mankind, all who are willing, up the highway of holiness back to perfection.

To sum up, the "last days" are the last days of mankind's attempt to rule itself without God, whereas the "last day" means the last day in God's program to restore this planet and its people, the seventh thousand year day. The previous six days, i.e. the previous six thousand years, have, in effect, been leading up to this 'last day', the great millennial Day. The start of the eighth day will see all the willing of Adam's family restored, they will be then God's family.

THE LAST DAYS (plural)

Paul speaks of these last days in his letters to Timothy - "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good", 2 Tim 3:1-3.

We already have perilous times in certain parts of the world, with warnings from governments that it is unsafe to travel in many places. The perilous times could especially be perilous to the faith of the Lord's people for at the end of this age there will be very subtle and

convincing deceptions current. Paul further says "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived". 2 Tim 3:13 and again "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;" 1 Tim 4:1-2

Our Lord Himself said of those days - "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" Matt 24:24 These deceptions will be very cunning, they will not appear evil but have a veneer of something good for as we know, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Those who have fully consecrated and committed their lives to the Lord will not be deceived, the words "if it were possible" implying that it will not be possible. But it will be a great time of shaking, a sifting out process. In one sense, however, it is a wonderful time to be living in, because we can see so much of our Lord's Word being fulfilled before our eyes. These evil times that are going to take place in the last days are likened by our Lord to the days of Noah and the days of Lot. The some immoral conduct rampant in Lot's day is rapidly increasing in our day, what was once viewed as depraved is now looked upon as quite acceptable. God's law and His standards are being totally ignored.

But let us now look at the beautiful words of Isa 2:1-4 "The word that Isaiah the son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".

The same message is in Micah 4:1-3; this shows its importance, the fact that God has seen fit to present it twice. The Micah message goes on to say - "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. For all people will

walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; and I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth even for ever." (Micah 4:4-7)

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

This is the wonderful time that we all long for, the time that will fulfil the desire of all nations. If we, as the Lord's people, prove faithful unto death, we shall be privileged to have a part in the great restitution work foretold in these passages. The symbol of the vine and fig tree could have two applications, firstly as a symbol of peace and contentment, no more agitation and restlessness as pictured by the stilling of the restless sea in Rev 21:1. Perhaps, there will be a getting back to nature, all with their own fruit trees and vegetable gardens producing their own food, as well as flowers and ornamental trees and shrubs, things pleasing to the sight, each like those things our first parents, Adam and Eve, enjoyed in their own garden of Eden.

It has been suggested by others, and, we believe correctly so, that it also symbolises the two phases of the kingdom, the fig tree the visible earthly phase, that is the nation of fleshly Israel under the leadership of the Ancient Worthies, the princes in all the earth of Psalm 45, and the vine the spiritual phase with Christ and the glorified Church. This is in keeping with the words of Isa 2:3 already quoted that the Law shall go forth from Zion, the spiritual phase of the kingdom, where it originates, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem - the earthly phase of the kingdom. It will be relayed out from there, the spiritual phase not communicating directly with mankind, not needing to as it has its fleshly representatives on earth.

Both Isaiah and Micah confirm that the mountain, that is, the kingdom is to be established in "the last days". Perhaps we might have been inclined to think that it would have been in "the last day", the Millennial day but it is evident that the lovely verses in both prophecies are progressive and cover a long period of time. The kingdom will not be reigning in power and glory during the last days, that is the time when the work of establishing or preparing it is in progress. The marginal rendering of Isa 2:2 KJV renders the word as "prepared" (in the last days), the Hebrew word used in both prophecies according to Young's Concordance having the meaning of "be formed, prepared, established" and mostly translated as "established, prepared, ready". How well the thought of being prepared fits in with our understanding that we are now living in the "day of preparation" as mentioned in the book

of Nahum. This understanding was first presented about the end of the 19th century; the signs of preparation being meagre in those days compared to today.

If we are observant, we can see many signs of the "preparation" for the kingdom. Recent literature published by the Maranatha Group pointed out the efforts that are being made behind the scenes to bring about a New World Order, One World Government linked with a One World Church. We would understand this to be Satan's counterfeit of God's eventual One World Government linked to a One World Church. We know that this counterfeit will not and cannot be successful, as it will not bring any true satisfying peace and stability, it will not fulfil the desires of all nations, it will fail just as we are told that iron does not mix with clay. (Dan 2: 43) In His own due time, God will take it over as we read in Rev 11:15 "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." (KJV) Note: Other translations than KJV translate this verse as "The kingdom (singular) of this world" suggesting the thought of One World Government to be taken over and placed in the hands of Christ and the Church.

In other areas, environmental awareness education is now starting even at school level, enlightening people also through the media to the preciousness of our earth and the responsibility for rectifying the effects of gross use of chemicals on the land and air and water pollutants. We have followed the cleaning up of dead waterways in Europe that are now swarming again with marine life. Tree logging and land clearing on an indiscriminate level has come to public notice. Government sponsored programs like "Land Care" in this country encourage the planting on a large scale, involving children also to plant and care for trees, also incentives for farmers to revegetate certain areas of their land, creating wild life corridors. These are just a few instances; more could be added to give a full picture.

For a good many years, the richer nations have assisted the poorer nations with financial aid, goods and know-how for the betterment of their citizens; Aid workers are helping and teaching them. In fact, most of the developed countries have an allocation in their budgets each year for helping poorer neighbours. What has been done so far is very inadequate, but it is a start and shows the preparation work in progress. Trade barriers are being brought down and as tariffs are reduced further, it will have the effect of slowly raising the living standard of the poorer nations. We do not expect everything put right before the kingdom comes, but the preparation work has commenced, a work that will continue on into the kingdom.

It would seem from Heb 12:27,28 that the work that will have been done will not be destroyed in the time of trouble - "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore we receiving a kingdom, which cannot be moved let us, have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." It is only those things that can be shaken that will be destroyed, that is, those things that are undesirable, that are out of harmony with God's will and are not wanted in the kingdom. We are assured that we have a kingdom that cannot be shaken, indicating that the preparation work for the kingdom also will not be shaken. How strengthening to our faith to see this work in progress and know that it is fulfilling God's word.

One of the great preparation works for the kingdom is the re-establishment of the nation of Israel, The kingdom could not commence to operate before Israel was established, since it will be the seat of the earthly phase of the kingdom, which has to be set up before the Ancient Worthies could be brought back. Israel will no doubt be their headquarters; we could tend to take for granted the various activities in progress throughout the world today and perhaps fail to see the hand of the Lord in them. God uses mankind to accomplish His purposes. Six thousand years have elapsed since the creation of our first parents, yet it is only in the last few years, comparatively, that all these momentous changes have taken place. This shows that they have not happened by mere chance, they show where we are on the stream of time and we can now surely see the day approaching.

THE LAST DAY (singular)

Comparing the "last day" with the "last days", we have seen that the "last days" are the period at the end of the Gospel Age, the time when the world is becoming increasingly evil and immoral. It is also the time of the harvest work, the separation of the wheat from the tares. In contrast to the world's becoming more evil, there is also a good work in progress, a preparation work for the kingdom. On the other hand, the "last day" is the kingdom itself, the one thousand year reign of Christ with the saints, the Judgment Day, the Day when all mankind will be placed on trial for everlasting life. Our Lord's words in John 7:37 were - "in the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. " At that time, the invitation was only to Israel and only to those of a right heart condition, whom the Father was calling to be members of Christ's bride, but the day was to come when His words would have a much more universal fulfilment.

This last great day of the feast could symbolise the last great thousand-year day when the invitation will be offered to all, not just a calling out of certain ones as in the Gospel Age. How well our Lord's words link with those in Rev 22:17 "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". Here we have the time when the work of the Gospel Age is over and the drawing power of God's Holy Spirit is operating for the benefit of all mankind; the Spirit and the Bride (the glorified Church) are extending an invitation to all.

Acts 17:30,31 is also speaking of this last day (NIV) "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." In John 12:47-48 we read our Lord's own word "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

They will be judged by the same righteous principles as taught by our Master at His first advent. What the outcome of this judgement will be is given in Isaiah 26:9,10 - "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." The Day of Judgment will be successful, the inhabitants of the earth in general will profit from it and become righteous, true children of God and inherit the restored earth, as in Matt 25:34 - "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" (KJV) There will however still be some that remain wicked when favour is shown to them and these will go into the second death

The 'last day' is also Resurrection Day, as Jesus said (John 6:39,40) "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one, which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." Jesus repeated this statement regarding the raising up on the last day in John 6:44 and 6:54. Then we have the words of Martha, speaking of the raising of her brother Lazarus (John 11:24) "Martha

saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." No doubt, others in Israel would have had this understanding regarding the resurrection and the last day

It might be asked whether the resurrection of mankind will commence before the last day begins. Our Lord's words suggest that it will not, but rather it will take place at the last day, or as some translations render it on the last day. This work will probably take place over a lengthy period of time as the multitudes that sleep in the dust of the earth are progressively restored to life in due order as stated in I Cor 15 :22,23 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." The first fruits, that is, the Church are raised right at the commencement of this day, followed by, the raising of all mankind. We note that the resurrection is never mentioned in connection with the "last

days" (plural), always with the "last day" (singular).

What a blessed time is coming for all the human family, when by our Heavenly Father's grace in Christ Jesus the work of the "last day" is complete! How beautifully this is pictured in Rev 21 3-6 "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely". Amen. (GT abridged)

"THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE"

The words of the topic occur twice in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. In the epistle, Paul goes on to elaborate on the tremendous blessings and privileges that have come to the Lord's people out of the riches of God's grace. But how can we put into simple, meaningful words of comfort and of challenge something of the boundless love and mercy of our God, of His mighty power shown in the wonders of creation, and the surpassing wisdom of His eternal purposes in Christ Jesus?

To meditate upon the riches of His grace is really to seek to comprehend the character of God Himself. This is a daunting task but as each one of us recounts something of the warmth that has come into our hearts and lives out of recognition of God's richness towards us personally, then we can all take new comfort and make new resolves to respond worthily to that grace with which we have been blessed.

The scriptures abound in accounts of God's richness towards those that are His – in His grace, His mercy, His love and power and wisdom. Our own experiences as we reflect back along life's way also confirm how bountifully He has favoured us. The Psalmist, who so often speaks for us, knew something of this, as we may read in Psalm 103 – "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy...as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us...The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him and His righteousness unto children's children."

The Riches of His Love

Turning to the New Testament, we find in the 15th chap-

ter of Luke's gospel the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, and these tell us much of God's love and His purposes of blessing. The last of these is the most familiar and is often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son. But how beautifully this paints a portrait of a father ever more ready to forgive and to lavish gifts upon his wayward but now contrite son, than the son had originally been to squander his inheritance on worthless pursuits. So we read in verses 20-24 "*And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.*"

This portion of the story never fails to touch our hearts as we see the overflowing bounty of the father's love and realise that this is a portrayal of the riches of our Heavenly Father's love towards each one of us. For quite some time the young man in the far country had struggled on in want, until at last he came to his senses and remembered the plenty of his father's house. How often we need to remember that our heavenly Father has no lack and, instead of trying to battle through alone in time of trial or difficulty, we need to draw on His boundless, always available resources. The apostle Paul reminds us (Eph 3:20) that our God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. So we can come to Him in faith, believing that He rewards them that diligently seek Him and so partake of

the richness of His grace in every affair of life.

Now it is one thing to have riches – our Heavenly Father certainly does – for all the marvels of creation are His, in wisdom He has made them all, and we may well ponder with the Psalmist what we might offer Him, for as Psalm 50:10 declares, every beast of the forest is His and the cattle upon a thousand hills. But our Father is not only rich in possessions but, more blessed for us, He is rich in His willingness and desire to show the wealth of His mercy and loving-kindness towards all His creation and particularly those who love and are drawn to Him. Truly, He is “*the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.*” (1 Tim 4:10) How then can we best express, explain, the riches of God toward us – what He has already done for us, what He daily provides for us and what He has laid up in Christ for us? Our own experience confirms His past and continuing favour and strengthens faith for the future, but what does His word proclaim?

The Riches of His Mercy

The apostle in Eph 1:8 tells us that God has made us accepted (highly favoured) in the Beloved, even in His dear Son, in whom we have redemption, forgiveness and an inheritance, All this is by virtue of God’s own riches in mercy and in His abundant generosity to us in the gifts of His grace, of wisdom and understanding of His will. But what are the riches of our Heavenly Father, out of which He so freely blesses us? In what do they have their foundations? First and foremost, the richness of His grace must surely spring from His so great love, as expressed in Eph 2:4-7 “*But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us.*”

Truly, what is this love that reaches out to those estranged from Him and dead in sins? This is surely the love of which Paul speaks in Rom 5:8 – “*God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.*” So we begin to see something of the wealth and extent of our Heavenly Father’s love, love which finds expression in His grace and favour poured out on His people. Only from such a heart of love could so great grace be shown. This is the love which is also so strong that no power in earth or heaven can separate the trusting soul from it. “*For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*” (Rom 8:38,39)

God’s grace is also seen in “His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” with mankind. (Rom 2:4) Those who appreciate His grace and are drawn to Him

also find God rich in wisdom which He is ready to give to those who seek. These find also that He is the fountain of that peace which is beyond understanding. As children of God, we are beneficiaries of His unmerited favour, and can testify with the Psalmist that He has lifted us “*out of the miry clay, set our feet upon a rock, established our goings and put a new song in our mouths, even a song of praise to our God.*” (Psa 40:2,3) Not only have we received the gift of His salvation, forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Christ, but we have been called, invited, to a heavenly calling, ever to behold His face. “O to grace, how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be!”

Beyond this, not only have we been saved and called by His grace, but day by day our Father cares for us out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Though we have trials, which at the time are not causes for pleasure, yet as we look back we can clearly see in these His watch care over us, the lessons learnt and the blessings which have come out of sorrow. And we can realise His Fatherly interest in the resulting fruitage of peace and righteousness, “*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 loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.*” (Psa 103:2-5)

The Riches of His Word

God has further blessed us with the riches, the treasure, of His word, providing comfort to sustain us along the narrow way and a hope to keep our eyes and our endeavours set right on. We may fully come to Him in every time of need with our burdens and our requests, for “His grace and power are such, none may ever ask too much.” And our God still waits to bless His people further. As we consider His past favours, we can well say with the apostle John. “*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.*” (1 John 3:1) What manner of love, indeed? What measureless riches are already ours? We could hardly complain if the message of the apostle stopped there, but he continues (Verse 2) – “*It doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.*”

The riches of God’s grace are then not only grounded in His love but He is able to meet all our needs out of His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. For the willing obedience of our Saviour even unto death has brought life and immortality to light and has opened for us the way of access to God, to whom we may draw near as unto a loving father. Such blessings purchased by our Saviour with His own precious blood, and those blessings in store for all mankind, for the bestowing of which the beneficiaries of His grace at this present time are being prepared, are all even now a glorious part of God’s rich inheritance in the saints. Amen.

“THE SONG”

Song is an expression of joy in the heart. Whenever people have occasion to express great joy, they do so in song. We just love to listen to choirs amongst our brethren singing praises to our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. It really is music to the ears. The Jewish people at one time however spent seventy years in captivity at Babylon. They certainly had no song in their hearts then. The Psalmist wrote of that time in Psa 137:1-4 - *"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"* -

However when God permitted them to return to their own land, to build again the wall of Jerusalem, under Nehemiah the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, they dedicated the wall ".....with gladness, both with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps," (Neh 12:27)

In prophecy the absence of joy is expressed by the absence of singing (Isa 16:10). Speaking of the time when God's favour shall have been restored to His people and all Israel shall be saved, the Prophet Isaiah says: *"Sing, ye heavens: for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth, break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel "* (Isa 44:23). The same prophet describes the time when God's spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh, he says (Isa 35:2) that the desert *"shall blossom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing"; and in Isa. 51:11: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return [i.e. from the grave], and come with singing unto Zion [Christ ruling with His Church in the Kingdom of God]; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."*

How the angels must have sung when our Lord Jesus was born, celebrating the good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people, which joy is to come through Him who was - *" anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows!"* - Heb. 1:9; Psa. 45:7. Jesus said to His disciples: (John 15:11) *"These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."* No other people on the face of the earth have so much to rejoice and sing about as do Christians who have an understanding of the love of God. Nothing else in this life could mean as much as the knowledge that we have the favour of our Heavenly Father, and the Lord's assurance (John

10:28) *that "neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand."* It surely follows that it is most natural for a Christian to rejoice and to sing.

The Apostle Paul, in Col 3:16 says *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* - In Eph. 5:18-20, he says: *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but 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."* Also in Phil 4:4 he says - *"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice!"* If we are following the example of our Lord Jesus we will be constantly rejoicing and a song of praise to God will be continually dwelling in our hearts.

Israel's Lost Song

Looking back into the Old Testament, we note that something rather unusual happened then as recorded in 2 Chronicles 29. For sixteen years there had been no song in the temple of the Lord in Israel. Then one day a wonderful change took place. We read in verse 20 - *"Then Hezekiah rose early and gathered the rulers of the city and went to the house of the Lord"* Then we read in verse 27 - *"And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar, and when the offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel."* When the burnt offerings began, the song of the Lord began also! So the trumpets blew, and the harpers began to play with mighty volume on their strings, and then, like the sound of many waters came the voices of the temple singers, and the house of the Lord was filled with songs of praise to God. Verse 28 goes on - *"and all the congregation worshipped and the singers sang, and the trumpets, and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished."*

Why then did Israel lose her song? In chapter 28 we find that Ahaz, the king, had no use for the worship of God, so he drove out of the temple the singers and the priests. King Ahaz was one of the most repressive kings that ever occupied the throne. The kingdom under him sank to the lowest conditions in every possible way. He cut in pieces the gold and silver vessels. He hewed down the altars, and put out the lights, and locked the doors. The temple was filled with dust and dirt, and became the abode of the birds of the air that built their nests in its neglected courts and filled it with their uncleanness. He built altars in every corner of Jerusalem and sacrificed to the gods of the heathen na-

tions and caused the people of Israel to transgress. (Verses 24,25) For sixteen years this lasted. Then the judgment of God fell upon the nation, and many of them were taken captives or slain by the surrounding nations.

It was closing the doors of the house of the Lord and forgetting about God that robbed Israel of her song. We must be so watchful at all times that the song does not go out of our life. We would never directly shut our Lord out. But we must be so ever careful and always on guard so that we do not to allow the door to slowly close and begin to keep our Lord out. . Some of these gradual door closing experiences can be as follows -

- Neglecting to read one's Bible.
- Decrease in time spent meditating on the word of God.
- Earnest prayer becoming too much of a task.
- Worship of God beginning to lose out to other distractions.
- Attendance to meetings becoming "all too difficult."

These are some of the ways that can make the song slowly go out of our lives. If such a situation were to occur how then can we get the song back? How can we gain that Christian experience which is so joyful and victorious? Let us go back to 2 Chronicles 29:27. It says, "*And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also.*"

Return of the Song

We recall that God ordained various sacrifices for Israel. For example, there were the trespass offering, the peace offering, the meat offering and the whole burnt offering. Each of these is symbolic, and teaches a lesson concerning the Christian experience. But the highest type of all these offerings was the whole burnt offering. In the other offerings either the whole or a portion of that offered became the property of the officiating priest. In some a portion was returned to the offerer but in the case of the whole burnt offering the entire sacrifice was devoted to the Lord, and was consumed by the fire upon the altar. It was typical of the kind of sacrifice God invites us to make of our wills and to give our all to Him. It is not completed by merely giving ourselves to Him at consecration - consecration is but the placing of the sacrifice upon the altar - it is the beginning. To offer the whole burnt offering is a life long work a life time commitment, keeping the offering upon the altar while Jesus, our High Priest, sees that it is all consumed.

When we first gave ourselves to God in consecration, what joy filled our hearts! What songs of joy rose to our lips as we sought to praise Him for the blessed privilege of being counted dead with Christ, yet rising to walk with Him in newness of life! But after a while,

little by little, perhaps we failed to keep our sacrifice fully upon the altar as we had initially promised. Maybe a little self-will began to find a place in our life, and correspondingly some of the joy began to go out of our life, until one day we awoke to the fact that we no longer possessed that great joy in the Lord we had once known. The way back is indicated by the 2 Chronicles text. "*When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also.*" When we begin again to place our offering on the altar, we resolve to see to it that all we have consecrated to the Lord is fully devoted to Him, so that there is no holding back of anything,

When the fire begins to consume the sacrifice, we recall the words of Peter - "Beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you," for this is what we are to expect; "but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (1 Pet. 4:12, 13.) For the self in us must be fully consumed before our whole burnt offering will be fully completed. And as the fire of those testing trials begins to come upon us and consume self, then the song of the Lord will begin again in our heart. We shall, as the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 4:13, "*rejoice inasmuch as ye are made partakers of Christ's sufferings*", and to rejoice with the Apostle Paul, "*Nay in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*" - Rom. 8:37.

A Mother's Influence

Going back to 2 Chronicles, we find that finally the time came when King Ahaz had to die. He had been such a vicious and wicked king that the people loathed him. They even refused him a sepulchre among the kings of Israel, so he was laid to sleep in a dishonoured grave (2 Chronicles 28:27.) and his son, Hezekiah, became king. His name means "Strength of Jehovah" In contrast to his father he was one of the most acceptable kings who ever sat on the throne of Judah - David and Joshua were the other two rulers. (2 Kings 18:5.) At 25 years of age Hezekiah's entire reign was one of reformation. He bore no resemblance of his father. The secret of the difference between father and son was a godly woman. His mother, Abijah; the daughter of the Prophet Zechariah, was a good woman. Abijah means my Father is Jehovah. No doubt in the midst of the idolatry of her wicked husband's reign she took the lad under her own control, and inspired him for the noble part he was to play. One of the best gifts God can give in this world is a Christian mother. Abijah evidently moulded and controlled the character of her son. The influence of such a wife and mother is of incalculable value still today.

Song of Hezekiah

The first thing Hezekiah did when he came to the

throne was to open the doors of the house of the Lord and repair them. He brought the priests and the Levites together and told them first to sanctify themselves, for they had been chosen to stand before the Lord and to minister to the people. Then he told them to cleanse the temple, to carry the filthiness out of the holy place, and to restore the vessels of the Lord. For sixteen days they cleansed the temple, one day for every year of abuse and neglect by Ahaz. They carried the uncleanness of heathen rites into the brook Kidron. (verse 16) the usual place for useless trash.

(Verse 21) A special sin offering was offered for the sins of the people. *"And they brought 7 Bullocks, 7 rams and 7 he goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and the sanctuary and for Judah."* An offering of so many instead of one would mean that it was to intensify the matter. Also, seven is a symbol of perfection or completeness. It was not an atonement day sacrifice as it was in April in lieu of September. No atonement had been offered in the temple for many years. This was a special atonement for the nation. When this was done, he commanded that the sin offerings and the burnt offerings be made upon the altar. (Verse 28) *"And all the congregation worshipped, and all the singers sang, and the trumpets sounded and all continued until the burnt offering was finished."* (Verse 30) *"and so they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped."*

Hezekiah told the priests to restore the vessels of the temple, which the wicked King Ahaz had carried away. There are some things that might well be restored in so many places of worship today. It is not necessary for us to offer physical bullocks, rams and goats for divine forgiveness, but the Lord's temple should always retain a respect and decorum. Appropriate demeanour and behaviour should always apply – for we are in the house of God. How would we stand before the presence of our Lord Jesus in our midst today? A clear message needs restoring in some places, namely, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that He was indeed the Son of God, that on the cross He bore the penalty of our sins to remove us from the sentence of death, that He was raised from the dead, assuring a resurrection for all mankind, that He was and is the Seed through whom blessings shall ultimately come to all the families of earth, and that the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the great central doctrine about which the whole plan of salvation revolves.

The Divine Remedy

So full of the song of the Lord, of praise to Jehovah God, were the hearts of Hezekiah's people, that when he told them of their privilege of bringing their sacrifices and thank offerings unto the Lord, he really managed to energise them for the number of the burnt offerings brought was overwhelming. Seventy bullocks,

a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs; and of the consecrated things, six hundred oxen, and three thousand sheep. But before the burnt offerings could be offered they had to be flayed -- skinned -- the covering with which nature provided the animal had to be removed. This pictures that in offering ourselves to God as burnt offerings, all that in man's sight might constitute a covering or excuse for our fallen natures must be taken away. For there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight, *but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.* - Heb. 4:13.

This work of thus helping to prepare the burnt offerings was a part of the duty of the priests. However, in verse 34 (Chap 29) we are told: *"But the priests were too few, so, that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests."* We too have to be on guard that we are upright in heart at all times.

Practical Lessons

1 The temple was opened. The Scripture teaches that every child of God is a temple of the Holy Spirit: **1 Cor. 3:16, 17** *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."* Eph 2:20,21 Further each is built *"upon the foundation of the apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the lord."*

If the song of the Lord has in any measure gone out of our life, are we willing to open the temple of our life to the will of God again, to get it back? Jesus is still saying today: (Rev. 3:20.) *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."* Let us open the door of our heart fully to Him now if we have not already done so, and the song, the joy of the Lord, will fill the heart. It is worthwhile to remember that the door will not be open forever to the high and holy calling. There will come a time when the Lord will have his 144,000 and the calling will come to an end.

2. They cleansed the temple. We would not worship in a temple like the one that Hezekiah found, mouldy and, dirty, and covered with cobwebs. The Holy Spirit must have a clean temple in which to dwell. (Isa. 52:11.) *"...be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."* It may be in just one thing, and what seems a very small thing, in which we are failing to conform our life to the divine standard.

But however small it may seem, if it is sin, it is taking away the song, the joy of the Lord, measurably out of life, and causing lack of the power whereby we might be enabled always to have the victory through Christ Jesus. Not until every nook and cranny, every secret sin has been cleansed, everything that in any manner violates the well-trained Christian conscience will there come complete peace, and power. Then the song of the Lord in all its beauty will rule in fullest joy.

3. They restored the holy vessels that had been taken away. There are things that need to be restored in one's life if the song of the Lord is to begin there. How often do we read the Bible? How often do we meditate on the wonderful words of life? The Prophet says: (*Jer. 15:16.*) *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."* Is the new creature within us being starved for lack of this essential spiritual food? Is this one of the vessels that needs to be restored?

4. Prayer Perhaps this is another vessel that needs to be restored. For any neglect of this wonderful privilege of communion with the Heavenly Father we are bound to pay the price by a decrease in our spiritual joys. We need so much to be in contact with our headquarters at all times and a good soldier does so in good times as well as bad. The adversary is so happy when there is the slightest decrease in communication between us and our Heavenly Father.

5. Christian Fellowship Possibly another vessel that needs to be restored is attendance at meetings for divine worship. The Psalmist expresses the spirit of every one who is living up to his or her privileges of joy in the Lord when he says (*Psa. 122:1.*) *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."*

The Apostle advises in *Hebrews 10:25*, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching,"* This is more fully relevant today than at any prior time in the history of the Church, now that the day of the Lord is so near at hand. How important it is for us to meet with those of like faith to discuss, to seek, to energise each other over the deep things of God. Certainly all of these things must be restored if we wish the song of the Lord to begin.

6. The rendering of the offerings One last thing was then done, in the rendering of the offerings, first the sin offering, and then the burnt offering. For the sin offering, all you have to do is to exercise faith in the sacrifice of Him who became a sin offering for us. *John 1:17.* *"Behold, The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"* No amount of work which we could perform in the service of God can entitle us to

any standing with Him. It is the covering robe of Christ's righteousness that makes us acceptable and gives us standing before God. (*Is 61:10*)...

*So the first requirement is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who has made atonement for us, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, 'but with His own precious blood.

*Then, in grateful appreciation, we would stretch ourselves upon the altar for the burnt offering and ask God to send the fire that shall utterly consume our sacrifice, utterly consume the self-will within us, while the song, the joy of the Lord fills our hearts.

*Let us lay aside every weight and close-girding sin; to be indeed dead with Christ, putting to death self-will, (*2 Cor. 4:10.*) ... *"that the life of Jesus might be manifest in our body."* The world can never give the song of the Lord in the heart; it is the life that is *"filled with all the fullness of God,"* the life of the burnt offering, the life of full surrender to the will of God, that gives us that song.

A New Song

This so beautiful "new song" is recorded in Revelation 14. Looking into the future, John saw one hundred and forty-four thousand standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, and heard as the voice of many waters, and as the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sang as it were a new song before the throne; and no man could learn that song but the one hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the lamb whithersoever he goeth. They were redeemed from among men, the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.

May the Lord add His blessing. By His grace, may we prove faithful and be numbered among the faithful ones on Mt Zion to sing that grand new song. (AK)

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THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-LONGSUFFERING

In the King James Version translation of Galatians 5:22 the Apostle Paul lists *longsuffering* as one of the fruits of the Spirit. Some of the more recent translations give this fruit a different name; in the Emphatic Diaglott it is called *forbearance* while the New International Version uses the term *patience*.

All three names were appropriate when the translations were made.

Colossians 1:10-11 shows us that when the King James Version was made, *longsuffering* was a different fruit from *patience*: “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being **fruitful** in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all **patience** and **longsuffering** with joyfulness*”. Both *patience* and *longsuffering* were necessary to articulate the Colossians “*fruitfulness in every good work*”, and hence we can conclude that the two terms referred to different fruits.

Vines Expository Dictionary distinguishes *longsuffering* and *patience* thus (quoting in part from the *Note* at the bottom of Vol. III page 12):

- “*Patience* is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial. It is the opposite of despondency”
- “*Long suffering* is that quality of self restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is the opposite of anger.”

Vine’s explanation distinguishes *patience* from *longsuffering* on the basis of the provocation received, and the response. *Longsuffering* is bearing up under provocation, and requires restraint when the natural tendency is to anger. Hence *longsuffering* may be regarded as a higher level fruit than *patience*, the exercise of which does not involve overcoming provocation nor anger.

1 Peter 2:19 – 20 shows the difference between suffering for our faults and suffering wrongfully, that is, the difference between exercising *patience* and exercising *longsuffering*. “*For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*” The temptation to be angry is greatest when one suffers for “*doing well*”, and hence the Apostle Peter is pointing out, albeit using different terms, the difference between the fruit of *patience* and the fruit of *longsuffering*. While *patience* is “*thankworthy*”, *longsuffering* is particularly “*acceptable with God*”.

As always, Jesus is our perfect example, and in verses 21 to 23 Peter goes on to say that Jesus displayed *longsuffering*: “*because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps; who did no sin,*

neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously”. Jesus had no sin, and so all the suffering He endured was suffered wrongfully. Yet when He was reviled He reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not – He did not retaliate. Jesus has left us the perfect example of the fruit of *longsuffering*.

Peter tells us that Jesus’ antidote for suffering wrongfully was to “*commit Himself to Him that judgeth righteously*”. In order to suffer wrongfully without succumbing to the temptation of anger we must also commit ourselves to Him that judgeth righteously. In other words, we must always be convinced 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), whether that be when we are receiving support or withstanding provocation.

Keeping our eyes fixed on our goal is another defence which helps develop the fruit of *longsuffering* and negate the tendency to anger. “*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.*” (2 Cor. 4:17-18) “*It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*”, (1 John 3:2) “*In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*” (Galatians. 6:9)

Yet another aid to the development of the fruit of *longsuffering* is to remember that, just as it was with Jesus, our accusers “*could have no power against us, except it were given them from above.*” (John 19:11)

The provocations to be overcome by the fruit of *longsuffering* come not only from the world, but sometimes also from our brethren. In his letter “*to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus*”, the Apostle Paul wrote “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, **with longsuffering**, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*”. (Ephesians 4:1-3) To walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called requires lowliness (i.e. humility), meekness and long-suffering towards one another. Our brethren provoke us from time to time with little things they say or do, or do not say or do. We need the fruit of *longsuffering* to help us keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*” (Psa. 133:1).

Each one of us needs a plentiful supply of the fruit of *longsuffering* if we are to overcome the provocations of the world and dwell together with our brethren in unity of spirit.