



“THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS”

Acts 3:21-26

“(Jesus Christ) Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”.

Restitution

Restitution refers to the restoration of all that was lost through Adamic sin with the benefit of having meantime gained a knowledge of good and evil. Restitution is a biblical concept that despite the actual word being referred to directly only once in the Authorized Version, stands as a centre stage teaching, giving great insight into and appreciation of God’s plan of the ages.

The word *restitution* itself is used only once in the New Testament in the Authorized Version. It is a translation of the Greek word *apokatastasis*. This Greek word is also only used once in the New Testament. Vines Dictionary tells us that *apokatastasis* is derived from *apo*•back, again, and *Kathistemi*•to set in order, ie literally meaning “*to set in order again*”. Other translations use the words restore and restoration; and these therefore appear to be good translations. And so the words restitution and restoration are very similar in meaning in this context.

Restoration

This link is further emphasized in Matthew 17:11 “He answering, said, “Elijah indeed comes, and will restore all things” (Diaglott). John the Baptist was the minor fulfillment of this spirit of Elijah as Jesus makes clear in the following verses. This thought is made even clearer in Luke 1:16,17 (speaking of John the Baptist) “*And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*”. The major fulfillment of the picture of Elijah is of course the glorified church, the completed Abra-

hamic seed of blessing; which shall indeed “restore all things”, in its ultimate and fullest sense.

The word translated restore in Matthew 17:11 is the Greek word *apokathistemi*; it is used 8 times in the Authorized Version and according to Strong’s Dictionary means to “*restore to its former state*” Another verse that uses *apokathistemi*, is Matthew 12:10-13 “*And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him...13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.*” Here it is well illustrated that *apokathistemi* (translated restored) means *a return to an original state*. In this case a normally developed hand became withered or shriveled and was then returned to its original normal state by way of regeneration.

Regeneration

This idea of regeneration is used in Matthew 19:28 “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”. The word regeneration is translated from the Greek word *paligenesia* meaning literally *new birth or rebirth*. This suggests how the restitution and restoration will occur, viz by the infusion of new life; this is one reason Jesus is referred to as the everlasting father, since the essence of fatherhood is the giving of life.

Restitution therefore means *a return to an original state*; this implies that the present state is a change from the original and that the changed state is a corruption of the original; otherwise there would be no desire to return to the original state. Since we are in the corrupted Adamic state we can only obtain an idea of what the future state will be like by looking backwards at what the original state was and identifying what was lost and paying heed to the scriptural descriptions of the future state due to restitution

What has been Lost?

Earthly Life First and foremost death entered into the world through the sin of one man; we read in Romans 5:12 “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”. We are all familiar with this fundamental part of that which was lost. Just as clearly, we are told that this mandatory Adamic death will be lifted through

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the ransom or corresponding sacrifice of Jesus. We should note that this will come upon **all** members of the human race; this is as sure as death came upon all through sin. We read in 1 Cor 15:21,22 "*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*".

What may not be so obvious is that this reinstated life is human or earthly life; viz of the same nature (Greek = *phusis*) that Adam had. Since we were in the loins of Adam our nature could be no different once the curse has been lifted. This is the end result once the ransom value is applied to all. Those called of God during the present Gospel age have the opportunity to sacrifice this earthly nature in order to inherit eternal life according to a spiritual nature. The world in general will have the opportunity to inherit eternal life according to this earthly nature during this period of restitution in the next age.

We also note that the above verse does not say that all humans *will* have eternal life. It specifically refers to the lifting of the mandatory death sentence as a result of sin that came upon all through Adam. The right to eternal life occurs as a result of individual testing once that Adamic sentence has been lifted. No such opportunity could exist prior to it being lifted. Then there will be no impediment to a person being able to obtain life in its fullest sense viz life eternal. "*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*". Revelation 22:17 and in Isaiah 35:1-6 "*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6 Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing...*"

In these familiar verses of Isaiah 35 we note that part of the restitution to earthly life will be victory not only over death but also over sickness; exemplified by the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame leaping as an hart. The surrounding verses show that this is temporally associated with the restitution of the earth; and therefore places it in the millennium. And so, one of the most important things lost was this opportunity for eternal life according to the earthly nature that Adam and Eve possessed prior to the fall.

Earthly Dominion "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**'" Matthew 25:34 This scripture comes from the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25. The beginning of the parable sets for us the time and age of the parable. We read: "When the *Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him*, then shall *he sit upon the throne of his glory*:³² *And before him shall be gathered all nations*: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats." This identifies the scene as the millennial reign of Christ when Jesus and his bride "judge the world". 1 Corinthians 6:2 *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?"*

The sheep referred to in Matthew 25 therefore must represent those of the world that have had the spiritual law of God written in their hearts epitomised and exemplified by

"love thy neighbour as thyself". We note how important this "royal law" is, as James puts it in James 2:8 "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" Jesus refers to these sheep as "other sheep" in John 10:16 "*And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd*". These sheep therefore cannot refer to the sheep of the gospel age since their trial by this time is over and they are actively participating with Jesus in the judging. If therefore these "other sheep" are the tried and tested members of the world, this kingdom they inherit cannot be the spiritual rulership kingdom of God offered to the overcomers of the gospel age.

So what is this "kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" referred to in Matthew 25:34? It seems the answer is given in Psalm 8 which is quoted in part by Paul in Heb 2:7 "*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas*". Psalm 8:5-8. Evidently this is an earthly dominion or kingdom. A dominion over the earthly works of God's hands. And these are in fact specified: viz all sheep, oxen, and other beasts of the field, fowl of the air and fish of the sea. Clearly, this is not a spiritual realm or kingdom; distinguishing it from that spiritual kingship promised to the overcomers of this age.

Paul tells us that this earthly dominion is to be granted to man in the future when he says in Hebrews 2: 8,9 "...But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus..." It is this kingdom which was prepared at the foundation of the world, which will be inherited by the tried and tested members of the world. This is the earthly inheritance and belongs to perfect man having an earthy nature.

Harmonious Environment

We have already seen that the inheritance for the obedient of the world is an earthly dominion; soon to be restored. We note that God initially gave this dominion to father Adam. This dominion does not just mean to rule over but also to tend and take care of. This implies total harmony with God's earthly creation We only need to glance at the state of the natural world to see how far man is from harmony with the creation. Species become extinct every year as a result of the selfishness of man, also manifested in the continual degradation of the environment. The environment is gradually being polluted and global warming poses a fundamental threat to the stability of the world environment. Even in our country there is increasing degradation of good farming land through salt rising to the surface, leaving land unusable and devoid of any life; a veritable desert

"*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing.....for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert*" { Isaiah 35:1-6 These verses suggest that the environment will return to its original pristine condition. The deserts shall blossom and the water of life shall flow through them. This will be a

reversal of the curse that was placed on the ground as a result of the fall. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: **cursed is the ground for thy sake**; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life". Genesis 3:17 This restoration of the environment will of course be required to sustain those coming back from the grave. The restored earth will be a glorious thing; it will be enjoyed and appreciated by those who will live on the earth eternally; to the glory of God.

Harmony with the Creator

Prior to the fall Adam enjoyed fellowship and direct communication with God. As a result of the fall this was lost. No longer was Adam perfect and therefore unable to enjoy the fellowship of God. Communication and fellowship can only occur as a result of restoration to righteousness or by way of a mediator. The faithful follower of Christ enjoys imputed righteousness at present. The world in general will require the mediation of Christ during the kingdom. Once all enemies have been subdued during the reign of Christ then the kingdom will be handed back to God in a perfect and righteous state, leading to a direct relationship with God once again. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" 1 Corinthians 15:24-26

"In this new order (the new heavens and the new earth) righteousness shall abound. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" 2 Peter 3:13 In this state God will once again dwell with mankind and mankind will again be his people. Individually, this fellowship will allow each to be styled a son (of God). "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. ²And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And 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...6...I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. ⁷He that overcometh shall inherit all things; **and I will be his God, and he shall be my son**" Revelation 21:1-7 It is this harmony with the creator that Adam lost and is eventually to be re-established during the time of the "restitution of all things"

The Restitution of All Things

The key verses in Acts 3 talk about the "restitution of all things" The question arises as to what these all things are. All things seems very comprehensive. From the above and also the context of the verses in Acts 3, viz that Jesus returns to the affairs of the earth after having gone away to his heavenly abode, it appears that "all things" pertains to the things lost on the earth and specifically as a result of the Adamic fall. Therefore, primarily this would have application to all nations since all have descended from Adam and upon whom the consequences of the fall had jurisdiction. It is possible however that "all things" has a wider application

and also encompasses two other falls, viz the fall of Israel and the fall of the heavenly host. (The latter item may be covered separately later)

All Nations

The ransom has already been referred to. It has been noted that all men will reap the benefit of Jesus' atoning sacrifice allowing them to have a trial for life eternal with the benefit of having tasted of the tree of good and evil through Adam. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" Genesis 2:17 This benefit to all is a vital prerequisite for the blessing of all the nations of the earth as expressed in the Abrahamic promise. "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice"

The Kingdom of Israel

All nations necessarily include the nation of Israel. But Israel is dealt with slightly differently and at an earlier time because of God's holy name and his promises to their fathers; since the gifts and call of God are irrevocable. We know that the Jews at the time of Jesus were expecting a conquering messiah to restore their kingdom and independence and an end to the "times of the gentiles". Their kingdom had begun with the reign of Saul and reached its zenith under Solomon. This kingdom was finally lost during the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah at the hands of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. The wayward course of the kingdom of Israel which splintered into the dual kingdoms of Judah and Israel once Solomon had died is a recurring theme of the Old Testament. It was because of their disobedience that their kingdom was destroyed. Of Zedekiah it was written: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him". Ezekiel 21:25-27

Even the apostles were expecting the kingdom to be restored to Israel. In Acts 1:6-8 we read: "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time **restore again** the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Jesus response to the question of when the kingdom will be restored to Israel is illuminating. He affirms that this will occur by saying that the times or seasons for this are in his Father's hands. The main fulfillment of this will be in the millennium when Jesus will sit on his throne, viz the anti-typical throne of David; which will fulfill the "sure mercies of David"

The sure mercies of David include that David's line or seed would endure forever and his throne (would endure) as the days of heaven. "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah". Psalm 89:35-37 We note that Israel here refers to the

whole nation of Israel and not just the northern 10 tribe kingdom of Israel that was formed after Israel split in two following the death of Solomon (David's son) "And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" 1 Chronicles 28:5

Jesus is the anti-typical David to whom these prophecies specifically apply. We read in Acts 13: 33-38. "God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, **I will give you the sure mercies of David.** Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" We read also in Isaiah 9: 6,7 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.** The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."

It is also clear that Jesus' faithful followers, the "Israel of God" will share in his throne, these are the throne members of the body of Christ that together with Jesus make up the Abrahamic seed of blessing promised to Abraham so long ago. Gal 3:29 "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise". "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: **If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:** if we deny him, he also will deny us:" 2 Timothy 2:11,12 "To him that overcometh will I grant to **sit with me in my throne,** even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" Revelation 3:21

We note that Israel will not be the only nation that will be judged and ruled over and that their restoration will be fulfilled in the wider context of the future reign of Jesus and his body members; who will rule over, judge and bless all the nations of the earth including the literal nation of Israel. However, as with many prophecies there appears to be a future more literal fulfilment as well as the spiritual. Firstly, Paul tells us that there are two seeds of Abraham; that which is according to the law (natural Israel) and that which is according to faith (Israel of God). "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all." Romans 4:16

The promises to the natural and the spiritual seeds are more or less intertwined. The earthly promises made to Abraham and his seed would necessarily have their fulfilment in a literal setting, viz they must have application to the natural

seed. An example is given in Genesis 13:14-16 "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: **For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.** And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered"

To what extent the natural seed will have a blessing role is unclear but scriptures such as Zechariah 8:21-23 and 14:16,17 suggest that it will be substantial "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you". "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain."

This blessing role presupposes the restoration of Israel as a nation, independent of Gentile powers. This has largely been fulfilled. The restoration of the polity of Israel was accelerated by the establishment of Palestine as the home for the Jews according to the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and marked the beginning of the end of the hegemony of gentile powers over the Jews. This culminated in the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948 as declared by the United Nations. And so the polity of Israel has been restored. Full restoration is still future and will require the experiences of Jacob's trouble and the New Covenant to have their effect. The historical events do however show and confirm that natural Israel will also be restored and therefore can be included in the restitution of all things.

Conclusion

Restitution is a beautiful biblical teaching. It refers primarily to the return to an original perfect condition of the human Adamic race through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. The phrase "restitution of all things" embraces all nations including literal Israel; for humanity. Life in its fullest sense will be restored, as will harmony with the creator and the earthly environment, including man's dominion over it.

"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".

Rev 21:4

The promises of God are not only great but precious, the Apostle declares. Gifts may be regarded as precious for various reasons, some of which might be:-

The giver: Many of us treasure some small, probably not very valuable things, that is, not valuable in the eyes of others, but because they came to us from a parent, a loved one, a Christian friend, they are priceless to us. Our great and precious promises are the gift of God, our loving Father, who so loved us each one that He gave His beloved and only-begotten Son for our salvation.

The price: There is a wonderful story out of the life of David recorded in 2 Samuel 23:15-17, which reads: *“And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it.”*

The gift David received on that occasion was merely a portion of water, but was purchased at so great a price – the hazarding of three lives – that he could do nothing other than pour it out in offering to God, so precious was it in David’s sight. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:18-19: *“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish.”* Like David, how can we do other than offer such dearly bought gifts back to Him in grateful service and obedience?

The value: It is sometimes said that *‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’* and so in the case of a gift its value may depend on the appreciation or otherwise of the recipient. We read in Hebrews 11:26 that Moses chose *‘rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of the Anointed greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.’* This surely is also the viewpoint of the faithful followers of Jesus today: Of all such, it can be truly said *“unto you therefore which believe, he (Jesus) is precious”* (1 Peter 2:7).

The certainty: Even the best-sounding promises are of no value unless there is absolute confidence in the sincerity and ability to perform of the giver. So as well as greatness and preciousness, the promises need to be certain of fulfillment, and here the Word of God thoroughly assures us: *“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith for He is faithful who promised.”* (Heb 10:23) *“For all the promises of God in him (Jesus) are yea and in him amen, to the glory of God by us”* (2 Cor.1:20)

The nature of God himself, with whom is no variability neither shadow of turning, and the finished work of Christ

are the Christian’s ironclad guarantee of the fulfillment of all the divine promises. Each one of God’s dear children has furthermore been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest or pledge of the rich inheritance which God has promised.

The scope: In earlier times ‘promise boxes’ were fairly common among Christian people and these held perhaps 200 or so little scrolls with a Scripture promise which could be selected for daily reading and encouragement. The Word of God itself is the great storehouse of all His promises and these relate not only to the eternal life and joy and peace and glory which are laid up for all who are faithful unto death, but also the assurance of our Saviour’s constant presence and of His grace and strength in every time of need and of His peace within our hearts.

The prospect: 1 John 3:2 reads - *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God and 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.”* What a prospect! Can we really comprehend it, to see Him as He is? And also in Rev.3:21: *“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne.”* What a privilege, what a prize, what a Saviour!

Further, we have present promises in Matt.28:20: *“Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age”*, in Hebrews 13:5: *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”* and in 2 Cor.12:9: *“My grace is sufficient for thee.”*

The purpose: Turning again to the Apostle’s words in 2 Peter 1:3 and 4, we see that all of God’s provisions including the gift of exceeding great and precious promises are all designed to guide Christians in the paths of new life and righteousness in Christ, to foster development of character and Christian graces so that ultimately they can be made partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The full realisation of this share in the divine nature awaits the completion of the earthly course, but even now we can rejoice in what God has already revealed to us and in us of His love and mercy and goodness through His dear Son, our Saviour.

Our loving Heavenly Father is the great author of all the exceeding great and precious promises of His Word. In response let us continue in our personal resolve to –

- Daily take more and more to our hearts and savour the full riches of God’s grace toward us
- Daily lay hold on all His precious promises, not only of future glory but of present help and strength along the narrow way.

“Faithful is He who calleth you, who also will do it.” 1 Thess 5:24 (Amen)

THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT SPOT

'The Robe of Righteousness Without Spot' is not really the full title. It is 'The Robe of Righteousness Embroidered Without Spot'. There is embroidering to do. We have to work on it to keep it clean. Years ago I was interested in the phrase 'The robe of righteousness' and later was happy to learn that there's a scripture that has this expression in it. In fact it is in Isaiah 61, the beginning of which Jesus read in the Synagogue. From verse 1 it reads: *'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'* Then further on in this chapter is recorded 'the robe of righteousness' which is part of a larger description of righteousness as it is supplied by God. Isa.61:10,11 reads: *'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.'* What lovely descriptions are listed here as illustrations of the Robe of Righteousness.

The Concordance says 'robe' is 'a mantle in the sense of a covering like a coat, cloak, an outer garment'. The sacrifice of Christ, who was undefiled, perfect, separate from sinners who gave himself a ransom for all, is now provided as a covering for justified consecrated believers who follow Him in the narrow way. Rom:4.25 reads: *'Who (that is Jesus) was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification.'* And in Rom.5:1 *'Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'* And Rom.8:1 *'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.'* Righteousness is justice, to be made right. Any can only be made right now through Christ by faith. From 1 Cor.1:29-31: *'That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.'*

We read furthermore In Rom.4:3-7: *'For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.'* Paul declares in Romans chapter 11 his heart's desire for Israel that they may be saved and how they were going about to establish their own righteousness by works of the

law. Rom.10:3-5 reads: *'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.'*

Seeing then that the true believer has this Robe of Righteousness imputed to him by faith, shall he keep it to himself in this state like the one-talent man who went and hid his talent in the earth and did not trade with it to gain extra talents? No, it has to be worked on, embroidered with fine needlework. In Young's Concordance it has for 'embroidered' *'to interweave'*. You know, it seems that interweaving makes it very strong, holding one to another, like a rope made of many strands joined together to make it very strong. There is an interesting verse, too, in the making of parts of the Tabernacle where God gave His Spirit to those willing to do his work. In Ex.35:35 we read: *'Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.'*

The true believer now, who is a Temple of God, (1 Cor.3:16) needs to do an embroidery work on his or her own character. There is a reference to this in Psalm 45:13,14: *'The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.'* This needlework seems to represent the finer aspects of character that need to be embroidered on this Robe of Righteousness which the believer is given. A list of these virtues is given in Gal.5:22, 23: *'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.'* And in verse 25: *'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.'*

It is a very exacting and delicate exercise to have all these aspects of character reigning together and each one may help the others to produce a strong fabric so that we may be able to rejoice even in tribulation. The apostle Peter lists a number of character traits that need to be applied to have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From 2 Pet.1:5, after saying in verse 4 that *'unto us are given exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust'* he says we need to give all diligence to add to our faith *'virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, And to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity (or, love). For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Peter also says in 1 Pet.1:7 that *'The trial of your faith is more precious than of gold that perisheth'* so we take many trials and many trying experiences for these virtues of character to be fastened into their proper place. Peter says also in 1 Pet.4:12,13: *'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 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.'* Paul also said that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to the successful ones.

In Psalm 45, part of verse 9 reads: *'King's daughters (plural) were among thy honourable women'* and the latter part of Psalm 45:14 and verse 15 reads *'the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.'* There seems to be a difference here between the virgins and the king's daughter of verses 10 and 11. *'Her clothing is of wrought gold and she shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework'* is how verses 13 and 14 describe her. Back in the latter part of verse 9 it reads: *'Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of ophir'*. Gold seems to represent that which is very precious and probably represents immortality. In Mal.3:3 it reads: *'And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.'*

In 1 Cor.3:11 Paul says: *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.'* So we see how much each needs to take great care with this fine needlework as each thread of the golden character is embroidered onto the Robe of Righteousness which is now used as a covering.

Each one has this Robe of Righteousness and it is being carefully embroidered with fine needlework as the experiences and trials of life work into fine traits of character. But it needs to be kept clean all this time because Christ wants His church to be washed by the water of the word so that *'He might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish.'* (Eph.5:26,27). Each needs to be very particular that there are no spots, stains, splashes, damage, even dust of this world, remaining on their garment and its needlework. We know we cannot always do the things that we would like to do, as Paul says in Rom.7:15, but then we see we have an advocate in Jesus Christ and His righteousness, *'and He is the propitiation or covering for our sins'* (1 John 2:2)

In the Old Testament in Leviticus, chapter 13, there is some interesting reading on leprosy. The Concordance describes it as the *'freckles of leprosy'* and that it represents sin. There is some later reference to Israel's offerings under the law in Numbers 19:2 *"Speak unto the children of Israel,*

that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish" and also in Num.28:11: *'And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the Lord; two young bullocks and one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot.'* Peter tells us in 1 Pet 1 :18,19: *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"* And in Heb.9:14 there is a similar statement: *'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot (the margin has 'fault') to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'*

Christ was made perfect through the things that He suffered and *'became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him'* (Heb.5:8,9). What a great example has been set before us! It should increase our desire to walk in His footsteps. There is a good admonition that Paul gives to Timothy in 1 Tim.6:13,14: *'I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession: That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* Each needs to come out of the world and be separate from the unclean thing, and God will receive you and *'will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* (2 Cor.6:18) *'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God'* (2 Cor.7:1) *'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.'* (Eph.4:29) .

There is also watching to be done, for siftings and testings will come to try the Lord's people. Paul warned about this in Acts 20:29-31: *'For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch.'* Peter and Jude also speak of these. 2 Peter, chapter 2, gives a vivid picture of false prophets and teachers and examples of what happened to other evil ones of the past, who at their end *'shall receive the reward of unrighteousness as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.* (v.13).

Jude also says that we should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints and he has many warnings in his short epistle. In verse 12 he says *'These evil ones are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you: clouds without water, carried about of winds: trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.'* This word 'spot' in Jude 12 is 'spilos' . In the Diaglott it has: *'These are hidden rocks in your love-feasts, feasting together without fear, feeding themselves; clouds without water, being swept along by winds; bare autumnal trees, unfruitful for two seasons, dead, rooted up.'* In verses 20 to 23 he gives encouragement and commends discernment: *'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the*

love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.' He is saying there is need to be discernment on the part of those in different situations and different actions taken.

As some words of the hymn say - we need to be washed. "I know this stained tablet must first be washed white and there Thy bright features be drawn...if I in Thy likeness, O Lord, may awake and shine a pure image of Thee." 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' (2 Pet.3:14) In the Song of Solomon, chapter 4, verse 1, it states: *Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold thou art fair:* and in verse 7: *'Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.'* Rev.19:7,8 reads: *'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.'* That is from the King James Version, but many other versions have *'the righteous acts of the saints.'* Many commentators think this is the actual righteousness granted to the wife who has made herself ready in the resurrection. All then may enter in whose lamps are trimmed and burning and whose robes are white and clean.

The Manna text for December 31 fits nicely in here: *'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'* (Psalm 116:12-14). (HG)

'Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.' (Jude 24,25)

NONE BESIDE

Thou, Lord, art all Thy children need
And there is none beside;
From Thee the strings of blessedness proceed,
In Thee the blest abide;
Fountain of life and all-abounding grace!
Our source, our centre and our dwelling place.
(Mme Guyon)

ENTER INTO REST

HEB 1:1-11

In a sense the title of this address doesn't quite describe my subject, which is more like **labour** to enter into rest. There is a contrast there between labouring and entering into rest, an apparent contradiction. We have heard much at the Christmas season of the year about the message of joy and peace which was to come from the birth of a child. We are reminded, too, about the angel's message when he visited Mary and told her of her favoured position. The angel also visited Joseph, Mary's husband, to announce that the son that was to be born to Mary was to be called Jesus because he would save his people from their sins.

When our Lord began His ministry to tell the Jews the good news about their salvation available through Him, the message that He delivered also included that passage in Matt.11:28-30: *'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'* As a word of explanation from William Barclay's commentaries, it means that my yoke fits well. It is perhaps the only reference we have to the life of Jesus when he worked in his father's factory, you might say, as a carpenter, because it was the job of the carpenter to actually mold the yoke to fit the bullock that pulled the plough. The yokes of those days had no padding as you find these days in the halter that fits around the bull's neck so it was a matter of carving that yoke to fit neatly around the particular animal that pulled the plough. And so, the yoke that Jesus

offers has no pressure point there to cause sores and distress. In that sense, His yoke is easy and His burden, although there is a burden to be borne, compared to other ploughs you might have to pull, is light.

This perhaps illustrates the two points that I want to bring out with that message of salvation which to me appeals somewhat to the mind of a person. It is something we know that we need because we see so much death, sorrow, and the results of that. The other part of that message of Jesus is to find rest, which I think appeals to the heart. It is something that even now we can experience and enter into. The concept of rest also appears in other parts of scripture, although that word is not necessarily used. I'm thinking of Peter's second sermon to the people in Jerusalem in Acts 3:19 where he says to the people: *'Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.'* There the message, the words that he uses, are 'times of refreshing' rather than having rest. In Genesis, after God finished His works of creation, the expression used is that God rests on the seventh day and this also has a context of rest for the believer, and I would like to develop that later on.

For the moment I would like to concentrate on the idea of refreshment and rest from work, although it's not really a reflection of rest **from** work, but rather a rest in work, because that is what God has done on His seventh, Sabbath day. He is now resting in His work. There are also times in

scripture where passages would seem to have only a local or immediate interpretation, but from a comment or prophetic utterance we see that it has a greater or another understanding as well. As an example text, beginning at Heb.3:7 we read from the Revised Standard: ‘Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness when your fathers put me to the test and saw my works of forty years, then I was provoked with that generation and said they always go astray in their hearts and have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall never enter my rest. Take care, brethren, lest there be any of you in evil, unbelieving hearts, leading you to fall away from the living God. Exhort one another every day as long as it is called Today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we share in Christ if only we would hold our first confidence firm to the end while it is said Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’

Who were they who were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was He provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they should never enter into His rest but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest remains, let us fear that any of you be judged to have failed to reach it for good news came to us just as to them but the message that they heard did not benefit them because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. We who have believed enter that rest. As He has said ‘as I swore in my wrath that **they** shall never enter my rest’, although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

The particular verse of Heb.3:7: ‘Today when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness’ is a quotation from the Psalm 95:7, and it indicates to me the fact that, even in the Psalms, David is saying in his day, ‘Today, when you hear his voice.’ So not only did the lesson have to be learnt referring back to the lesson that had to be learnt by Israel and they rejected it, even in David’s day the ‘Today’ applied to him, and here the writer of Hebrews is also appealing to those he is writing to saying, Today there is a warning not to harden your hearts because there is a rest from the message to believe. The words in the Revised Version put the quotation from the Psalms as a question, and in Hebrews it seems the writer there is appealing to those to whom he is writing. Weymouth has it: ‘Today, if you hear his voice’ as if it is a rhetorical question that if you have this message spoken to you, and the message comes in the verses that follow, the warning that was given and the consequences of their failure.

If we look at the Psalms, there is a slight difference in the reading when we come to the quotation in Hebrews, because in the Psalms it has their rebellion at Meribah as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, whereas in Hebrews it translates that and gives the meanings of those words in the sense that God was grieved with those people. And so we

have urgings and appeals throughout this whole passage. To them was issued the warning, those that died in the wilderness, ‘they shall never enter my rest.’ In fact these words are almost a comment to Heb.3:10, ‘Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said, They always go astray in their hearts.’ Weymouth is even stronger, using some very strong words. He says: ‘I was greatly grieved with that generation’. Some translations suggest ‘I greatly loathed that generation’.

We do, of course, realise that Joshua in a sense led that next generation of people into the promised land and to them it is recorded that He gave them rest in the land. It may be asked what kind of rest was it that was given when they entered into the land?

- First of all, they did not have to build houses or dig wells. This is recorded in Deut.6:10. So it would indicate the rest they were offered did not, for a start, include hard physical labour.
- Secondly, it was a place of bounty, as quoted in Ex.3:8: ‘And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.’ So there was a place flowing with milk and honey.
- Thirdly, it was a place over which they would triumph.
- Fourthly, it was the fulfillment of God’s promise to His people of an inheritance in the land promised to the fathers. We are well aware that when Abraham entered the land he was told to look over the land and God promised that all that he could see would be his.
- Fifthly, it was a gift of grace. Joshua 1:2,3 reads: ‘Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan thou, and all his people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that I have given unto you as I said unto Moses.’ Now it was a promise and it was a fulfillment of that.
- Sixthly, it then required an act of divine intervention when God dried up the waters of the Jordan so that the people could walk across dry shod.
- Seventhly, but not least perhaps, it was a place of conflict. There were wars to be fought with the people being dispossessed.

So I see in this, the people entering into their promised land a picture for the believer. There are many blessed promises given to us, and no doubt we have our favourite ones. Ephesians speaks many times (nine, I believe) of being blessed in heavenly places. The word ‘places’ is supplied, so we are really blessed with ‘the heavenly’.

1. We see that vision of heaven. It is a place abounding for us. Think of all the blessings that God has given us. ‘Eye has not seen nor ear heard of the things God has prepared for them that love Him’.

2. It is a place for the Christian to triumph. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.
3. It is in fulfillment of God's promises. He promised the church that He has dedicated them for a particular purpose.
4. It is by the gift of grace. *'By grace are ye saved'*
5. It requires an act of divine intervention. God had to send His son to redeem us from the curse of the law.
6. It is not without conflict. We have to take up our cross and follow Him to dispossess the enemy.

Coming back to my text passage, Hebrew Ch.4, after the writer has quoted from the Psalms, he deals with the example of Israel, of that generation which fell in the wilderness. We have the lessons to be learned. *'Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us take care, lest you be judged to have failed the test'*. The sense of failing the test would be that we have not played the game properly, it is as if the judge has found we did not obey the rules, we have been found out, that there is something where we have taken an unfair advantage.

So 'the rest' I see as being applied to us because it says while a promise to enter into His rest remains (Heb.4: 1), there is a promise remaining to be fulfilled. Also in verse 2, that message came to us as well as to them. I know the writer is perhaps addressing those Christian believers a long time ago, as we read these words and understand them the message is coming to us. And in verse 8 and 9, *'If Joshua (Jesus) had given them rest then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a (Sabbath) rest for the people of God.'* Again relating back to the creative work of God in that He rested from His work on the seventh or Sabbath day, and so to the believer the rest that he enters into is a Sabbath rest.

It is important perhaps to look at the appeal that Joshua made to the people just before they entered, at the end of his life. There is an address by Joshua in Joshua 23 and another in chapter 24. Joshua 24:15 ends with that well-known verse: *'If you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your father served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'* Then the people replied in verse 16: *'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage and who did great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way in that we went, and all the people through whom we passed. The Lord drove out from before us all the people, the Amorites who lived in the land; therefore we will serve the Lord for he is our God.'* Whether Joshua saw some insincerity in that or no indication that the people actually meant what they said or hadn't put away their idols, we can't be quite sure, but Joshua comes back to them and says in verse 19: *'You cannot serve the Lord for he is a holy God: he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.'* The people protested again, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord'*. Joshua's reply to that is: *'You are witnesses against yourselves for you have chosen the Lord to serve. They replied, We are*

witnesses.' And to show that they were true to their profession, Joshua told them to put away their foreign gods.

Now, maybe Joshua at that stage was told by the Spirit that the people were not fully for God. The Psalmist seemed to say that because he said that if Joshua had given them rest then there would not have been another day mentioned for that 'Today' period. And it is, of course, a very sad commentary if we look at the judgment. It was only a comparatively short time after death of Joshua that the people began to serve other gods. The lesson, of course, that we learn from this and the people's rebellion in the wilderness, is not to harden our hearts. I suppose the idea of hardening our hearts is saying, Well, we won't do what God want us to do. We like to do our own thing. We will serve Him in the way we want to. God's care and love demands obedience. The children of Israel were pushing it to see how far they could go before they had sinned enough for God to punish them. It is indeed a tragic scene of the whole generation that had to die because God was angry with them.

In Hebrews, chapter 3, there is a whole series of words that seem to build up the rejection of them, from verse 16, some when they had heard were rebellious and God was provoked by them. They sinned and finally they were disobedient, and it was to them was the prophecy that they would not enter the land. In chapter 4 we have an indication that it was a lack of faith that prevented them from entering the land. It says that the good news came to us as it came to them, but with them it was not met with faith. Maybe the faith in believing that God had appointed Moses to be their leader and a willingness to follow him. So we need to see what God's message is for us to follow those instructions in the leadership of those who look after our spiritual welfare.

The nature for the believer now of the rest promised is different from that given to the children as they entered the land of Canaan. It is mentioned in verse 9. It is a Sabbath rest. It reminds us, indeed, of God's creative work and that on the seventh day God rested. It doesn't indicate that God took His ease. We can't imagine God at the present time taking His ease, but at the present time He has entered into experiencing the results of that work. There is a need for us to have a constant faithful watchfulness if we are also to enter into this rest. There are many allurements and attractions to sin. In verse chapter 3: 13 it mentions that, and personifies sin as having allurements and attractions, but those attractions are fraudulent. Sin conceals its true intent. As indicated, when Israel entered that land, first of all they did not have a life of ease. They had to go in and possess the land. There were those conflicts to be won and the enemy dispossessed. Faithfulness to God requires constant watchfulness. The promise for us is to enter that spiritual Canaan. We are offered entrance to the heavenlies. Even now we see that vision of God of restoration of all things.

So my purpose in this talk is just to remind you that by giving you the example of Israel, how they failed and the extent they went to in testing God. They found God was faithful. He did as He promised. So, my prayer is to be faithful as long as it is called Today. (CG)

WHAT GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE

“Fear the Lord and serve him in truth and with all your heart, for consider what great things he hath done for you” (1 Sam.12:24)

These were the words of Samuel the prophet to the people of Israel. The nation had been kept and controlled in the hands of judges for a considerable period of time, but the time came when the people wanted a change of government. They wanted a king to rule over them in place of judges. Samuel had pointed out to them that God had cared for them very well when judges had control of their welfare, indicating to them that they would not benefit by the rule of a king.

But Israel, seeing other countries around them being ruled by kings, insisted that they also have a king to rule their country. This is clearly shown in the chapters previous to Chapter 12. Samuel had repeatedly told them of their lack of appreciation of God’s goodness towards them and the text verse is a final appeal to them not to turn away from the Lord but to *“serve him in truth and with all your heart, for consider what great things he hath done for you.”* Seeing that God had done many wonderful things for Israel, Samuel used it as a reason why they should show their appreciation to God by being faithful to His law.

The same principle is true with us today. God has richly blessed us in many ways. He has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light and this light has given us much to consider. There are indeed many admonitions in the Scriptures encouraging God’s people to consider, to reflect, to study, to ponder. The truth of God’s word is reasonable, all embracing and in harmony with what we would expect of a God of love, of mercy, of justice and wisdom, so that it always does us good to consider the many aspects of the plan of God, especially His consideration for the church He is calling during this present time. Looking over the Scriptures we find that there are various places where we are advised that we can consider certain things with profit.

Jesus told us in Matt.6:28-29 that we can profit by considering the lilies of the field. Jesus said: *“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”* All flowers have their special beauty and when one examines their delicate form and colour, we certainly see the hand of the Creator in them. But the lesson Jesus wanted us here to consider was not particularly from the standpoint of their beauty but with a view to learning the lesson of God’s care over His creative works, especially His people. The fact that the growth and beauty of the lily come to it without its toiling and spinning shows us that God is abundantly able to provide for His people, not in a miraculous way as He does for the lily, but if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, the material things will be provided also.

David was one who found it profitable and received a great

blessing from a study of the marvellous creative works of God. In Psalm 8:1,3,4 we read: *“O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens. When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that they visitest him? David must have often taken note of God’s marvellous creative works including the beauty and glory of the heavens at night. In Psalm 19:1-3 he says not only the heavens show forth his glory but the “firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.”* There is no need for words to express the marvels of God’s creation and His care, His wisdom, over all that He has made.

There is no doubt that David got a great blessing from considering these things and it helped him to appreciate God’s care for him. It will do the same for us. The Lord’s people who are called during this present time are His new creation. How much more will He care for us? *“Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe thee, O ye of little faith.”* (Matt.6:30). If we properly consider the material things from which we can learn lessons of God’s care and then note how these lessons apply to us even in the little affairs of our Christian lives, they should help us to realise that God’s over-ruling providence is over us and providing for the more important needs of our spiritual lives.

There are many assurances from God’s word that He will never leave nor forsake any of His people provided their faith is firmly fixed on Him and His promises to them. David was greatly blessed by his consideration of the greatness of God and all His marvellous works and this helped him to bring his life into harmony with the commandments and laws of God. As David himself said: *“O how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day”* (Psa.119:97). The Lord’s people are even more blessed because they have been given to understand the special call of the gospel age and the spiritual phase of the plan of God.

Going back to the text in 1 Sam.12:24, the great things Samuel had in mind which God had done for Israel would have included the marvellous way in which He provided for them in the exodus from Egypt and afterwards. In Psalm 105 David remembers God’s providence to Israel. He brought them forth with silver and gold and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. Egypt was glad when they departed for the fear of them fell upon them. He spread a cloud for a covering and a fire to give them light in the night. The people asked and He brought quails and satisfied them with the bread from heaven. He opened the rock and water gushed out that ran in the dry places like a river. He remembered His holy promise and Abraham, His servant. He brought forth His people with joy and His chosen with gladness.

In Acts 7:34-37 Stephen gives a similar account, reading from verse 36: *“He brought them out after that He had showed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness 40 years. This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me; him shall ye hear”* This prophet, as we understand, is Jesus, as we see by referring to Hebrews 3:1 which reads: *“Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him that appointed him as also Moses was faithful in all his house”*

What the Apostle Paul is telling us here is that Jesus is the high priest who is the great one worthy of our consideration because of his faithfulness to his appointment, not as a servant as was Moses, but as a Son. Also verse 6 says: *“Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant for a testimony of those things which were spoken after, but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”* So we see that we who have been called now are not under the typical Jewish arrangement with an earthly high priest but we have Jesus as our High Priest who is now elevated to the heavenly realm because of His faithfulness.

In Hebrews 2:9 the Apostle has shown to us the character of Jesus, including his willingness to leave the spirit realm and become a man. He says: *“but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”* During his earthly life He proved obedient to His Heavenly Father under the most trying experience anyone could go through. Further to this, some of those for whom Jesus tasted death are to be given the opportunity of becoming his brethren, as verse 10 says: *“For it became Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.”*

This is something we should continually keep before our minds, how God has condescended to take some of these fallen sinful human beings and lift them up to a condition and position to be partakers with Jesus of the heavenly calling, Peter says in 1 Peter 2:5: *“Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* It is because our High Priest has actually experienced the exceeding sinfulness of sin as we see in Hebrews 2:17 that we can benefit by His life and His example: *“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”* This is something we can well consider, this great thing the Lord has done for us.

“All of these experiences through which the Heavenly Father caused His beloved Son to pass before exalting Him to His own right hand of majesty and committing to His charge the great work of blessing all the families of the earth were not merely tests of fidelity of the only begotten

of the Father. The Scriptures assure us that they were necessary also to fit our Lord to sympathise with those whom He thus redeemed that He might be able to sympathise and succour such as would return to full fellowship with God through Him – the Church during this age and the world during the Millennial Age. *“That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God”, one who can have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way; for that he himself also was compassed with infirmities.*” (Vol.5, page 129)

The Apostle Paul again exhorts us to consider Jesus in Hebrews 12:3: *“Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”* There is much for us to consider here but the main point would be the example of Jesus in enduring the very, very difficult experiences of His whole life. As we have it in 2 Timothy 2:3, we should endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ and thus develop a likeness to the character of Jesus. Looking back over all our many blessings, let us ever be grateful to our Heavenly Father for His many provisions for us, remembering that our temporal as well as our spiritual needs are indeed great things the Lord has done for us through Jesus our Saviour. (JH)

"YOUR FATHER KNOWETH"

Matt. 6:8

Our Father knows what things we need
Each step along the way,
His eye of love doth never sleep,-
He watches night and day.

He knows sometimes, like ripening grain
We need the sunshine bright,
Again He sends the peace that comes
With shadows of the night.

Sometimes our pride would fain unfurl
Ambition's flaunting sail,-
Ah! then He knows we need to walk
Humiliation's vale.

Sometimes He takes our eager hands
And folds them on our breast,
He gently lays our work aside,-
He knows we need to rest.

Sometimes we need companionship,
Sometimes, "the wilderness,"-
How sweet to feel He'll know and give
The state that most will bless!

Then let us leave it all with Him,
Assured that, come what may,
Our Father knows just what we need
Upon our pilgrim-way.

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