

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

VOL. XXXVII    January, 1954    No. 1

## A New Year of the Lord's Planning

*"Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life,  
or by death." - Philippians 1:20.*

DOUBTLESS, for some, the new year will be an entrance into the joys "prepared for them that love him"; possibly for all of us, as different brethren have inferred from various reasonings. It will without doubt give all true disciples opportunities for growth in grace, opportunities of learning whether we have been hearing him, or have been listening to the theories of men; and perhaps of having more sympathy for the speculators and less with the speculations; of putting off the ways of the flesh, "bringing every thought into captivity to Christ," and learning to "wait on the Lord" -- because at last we have learned to appreciate the "righteousness and sanctity of the truth." (Eph. 4:24, Cambridge Bible.) If the Lord should bless us with somewhat more of this world's bounties than some of our neighbors, the privilege of "doing good unto all men as we have opportunity" will doubtless clearly prove that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," more blessed to learn the love that "doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own."

There will be occasions for speaking the truth as the Lord's witnesses. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles [Gk.: logia] of God." Jesus, with his perfect brain and his millenniums of dwelling with the Father, did not venture to speak anything except those things, that the Father gave him to speak as his logos, his mouthpiece. There will be services to perform, but "if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth," whether it be in laying down his life for his brethren, or in doing good to all men, or in "providing for our own," those God's providence has put under our care. If we will place ourselves unreservedly under divine guidance, we will not be laid open to the doing of foolish things, or sensible things in a foolish way. He who said, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, and all these [necessary earthly] things will be added unto you' regardless of how near you may get to a "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation," will most certainly make it possible for us to provide for our own, in his way. Just "lift up your heads" when you see that "these things are coming to pass," being confident that he who placed certain ones under our care, did so because of his interest in them, and that our being taken away will not lessen his interest in them. On this subject see the excellent advice given regarding "Our Children in the Time of Trouble," Reprints, page R1963; Z, April 15, 1896. A consciousness that we are "ministering . . . of the ability which God giveth" will guard us against the error of slothfulness in any feature of the business the Lord has committed to our care. Instead, we will "do with our might what our hands find to do" -- the tasks

God has assigned for our hands. Only thus can Christ be magnified in our bodies; only thus can we present our bodies living sacrifices, acceptable to him; only thus can our dying daily be pleasing to him; and only thus can we face with confidence the privilege offered us of magnifying Christ in this body "by death."

For one who honestly has this desire, it is a pleasurable task to "bring every thought into captivity to Christ, casting down imaginations and every [other] high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God," "whom to know is life everlasting." "Demolishing reasonings" is the translation the Emphatic Diaglott gives, a translation very acceptable to flesh dead enough to prefer the "mind of Christ" to its own. Christ will be magnified in our bodies this year if we live not only the first verse of Romans 12, but also verse 2 (Rom. 12:2), presenting our bodies living sacrifices, and being transformed by the renewing of our minds -- the one as important as the other.

No sacrifice will be acceptable if carried out under the direction of an un-transformed mind. To mind the things of the flesh is death; for in our flesh "dwelleth no good thing"; minding the things of the spirit, the mind of Christ -- always out of harmony with human reasoning -- is life. As an advance payment, there is "peace and righteousness and joy in the holy spirit." With this "peace of God ruling in our hearts" there will be no room for "anxious thought for the morrow," but full confidence in our Great Provider and his precious promises.

Graciously our heavenly Father has left with each individual much of the deciding about details of his life. Thus some will lay away great stores for the future; and some will live day by day, trusting the Lord for the morrow; and all will make some mistakes -- those with the great store finding that their love for their neighbors has grown so barge that the stores are too small; and the one who lives day by day discovering that he should have taken thought for the morrow, though not "anxious thought." Some will be trusting him in times of great stress; others "moment by moment."

We should be dynamos, continuously appropriating the power that is waiting for us to lay hold on it that we may be "strengthened with all might according to his glorious power"; not just storage batteries coming at long intervals for his filling.

Note that it is not, "I shall magnify Christ"; but "Christ shall be magnified." The flesh says, "Let me do the planning of my life and I will magnify Christ," little realizing how greatly every such life must disgrace him. Let this year instead be for us a living for others, "always the bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body."

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

- P. E. Thomson.

## New Wine in Old Wine-skins

*"Who do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" - Matt. 9:14.*

BEFORE CONSIDERING the parables themselves, it will be helpful to note the conditions which led our Lord to give them expression. They were uttered at the feast which Matthew, either in the evening of the same day on which he had been called to be a disciple, or shortly thereafter, had prepared in our Lord's honor. - Luke 5:33-39; Mark 2:18-22; Matt. 9:9-17.

It seems evident that there was no lack of conversation at Matthew's table. Besides the publicans (that is to say, tax collectors) and sinners (those who made no religious claims or professions) who reclined with him, there lounged in the court outside the room, or even in the room itself, many neighbors whom the customs of the East permitted to add themselves, uninvited, to the company. Among these were certain Pharisees, and their scribes, rabbis, and doctors of the law, who had already been worsted in their dispute with Christ when he healed the man who was sick of the palsy (Matt. 9:1-8); certain also of their ardent young disciples. Some of the disciples of John the Baptist were there too. Among these bystanders there arose a discussion, a discussion which was mainly an adverse criticism. The discussion turned on eating and drinking, as was natural at a least, and various issues were raised, as for instance, whether it was not better to fast than to feast; and, with whom was it lawful to eat.

The Pharisees did not approve of eating with "publicans and sinners"; but with a certain awe of Jesus, and remembering how he had previously discomfited them, when he had forgiven the paralytic his sins and cured his palsy, they first put their disapproval into the form of a question, and then asked the question of his disciples, not venturing to ask it directly of him. To their question: "Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?" his disciples not being ready with an answer, our Lord made a threefold reply. First he cited a well known proverb: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Next he advised them to learn the real significance of the Scripture found in Hosea 6:6, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice"; and finally he gave them a distinct declaration of the object and character of his mission: "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners."

### **BIGOTRY AND HOW TO MEET IT**

No sooner is the question, "Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?" answered than another is raised, raised first, probably, by the disciples of the Baptist. They object, not so much to the company in which Jesus sits; for they cannot forget that the Baptist himself called publicans and sinners to repentance (Luke 3:12); but they are amazed that he, to whom John gave witness, should sit at a well spread table, and partake of sumptuous fare. *That* was not like the Baptist. He lived in a wilderness, on locusts and wild honey. Was it right, was it kind, that One whom John loved so well should feast when John was in prison? Was not fasting always better than feasting? Was it not much more suitable and becoming in view of the times of stress through which they were passing?

What was the mistake which these two sets of critics made? Were not the Pharisees right in refusing to associate with the irreligious? Were not the disciples of the Baptist sound in their views that fasting was more appropriate than feasting?

The mistake which these men made was a mistake which has been repeated many times since, a mistake which, we trust, all of our readers as well as ourselves, seek to avoid. It was the mistake of making themselves the standard by which all others were to be measured, and not only measured but. condemned. Even Jesus, it seems, must come under their censure if his thoughts were higher than their thoughts, his ways broader than theirs. "*We* do this or that; *we* think thus and so; why don't you?. We will lay our ban on you if you don't" -- this has been the cry of the bigot in all ages and generations. "*We* do not see this feasting to be right, and therefore it must be wrong." We cannot too carefully guard ourselves against being infected by this self-righteous and intolerant temper which must be a thousandfold more base and wicked than any errors of thought sincerely held. Christ was in the right, though "we and the Pharisees" thought him wrong.

When we meet a bigot, we are tempted to meet him in a temper as arrogant and as self-sufficient as his own. Let us therefore the more carefully mark how the Lord Jesus met these austere bigots of the law. Their objection lay against the new tone which he seemed to be giving, and really was giving, to the religious life of men. They held that religion demanded a rigid and austere life; that it enjoined fasting, abstinence from comfort and joy -- in one word, asceticism. Their real complaint against Christ was that he was departing from this conception of religion. What they meant was: "You are giving a festal tone to life. You rejoice with those that rejoice, as well as weep with those that weep. You do not fast and make your disciples fast. You go to a marriage feast as readily as to a house of mourning. You even feast with sinners, who should do nothing but bewail their sins, and their exclusion from our synagogues. You give an added joy, and the sanction of *your* presence, to *their* festivities."

To all of which our Lord replies by three exquisite parables: the parable of the bridegroom and the bridechamber; the parable of the old garment with a new patch; and the parable of the new wine poured into old wineskins.

### **PARABLE OF THE BRIDECHAMBER**

First of all he speaks the parable of the bridechamber. "Can the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?" "Can the friends of the bridegroom be gloomy and mournful when he is about to be married?" This figure of a bridegroom is one of the most precious to be found in the Scriptures. As all are aware, it is used in the New Testament to denote the bonds of love and affection which unite our Lord, the heavenly Bridegroom, to the Church of this Gospel Age. As St. Paul, writing to the Church of Corinth declares: "I have espoused" [or betrothed] you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:2.) And how the true lovers of Jesus long for the time to come when they shall experience the consummation of their hopes, and go in with him to the marriage-feast, entering fully and for ever into the joys of their Lord!

In the passage before us, however, Jesus was not presenting himself as the betrothed Bridegroom of the Church. There was no spirit-begotten Church to whom he could be betrothed when he spoke these words at Matthew's feast. Not until after he had given his life for her sake; not until he had been raised from the dead by the Father's power; not until he had ascended on high, there, at the Father's right hand, to appear in his presence on her behalf; not until the waiting followers of Jesus received the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost, was there even the nucleus of a Church to whom, as a spirit being, he could be betrothed. Then, indeed, it was, on the day of Pentecost, when the holy spirit was given, that our heavenly Bridegroom betrothed the Gospel Church to himself, in love.

## **JEWISH BRIDE REJECTS BRIDEGROOM**

But the figure of the bridegroom had been used in the Old Testament of Jehovah and his relationship to the Jewish Church or nation. When Christ came, He came as the Father's representative, to claim this Jewish Church for his own. "And his own," we read, "received him not." - John 1:11.

From *this* standpoint, this brief parable, quite apart from the beauty and interest it has for us, had a special force both for the disciples of the Pharisees and for the followers of the Baptist. The Pharisees held by the "Law and the Prophets." And the Prophets had spoken of a coming Bridegroom who should betroth Israel unto himself "in righteousness and in loving-kindness and in mercies," who, though her "Maker," should become her "Husband" and "Redeemer." (Isa. 62:5; Hos. 2:19, 20; Isa. 54:5.) Their own rabbis had pronounced this "Bridegroom" to be the Messiah, and had foretold, "All fasting shall cease in the days of Messiah; there shall only be holidays and festivals, joy and gladness and cheerful feasts." So that, by his brief parable, our Lord was recalling their own Prophets and rabbis to the minds of the Pharisees. He was announcing himself as the expected "Bridegroom" and "Messiah" and showing them how even their own teachers had foreseen that the sons of the bridechamber, the companions of the Bridegroom, should not fast in his day, but hold holiday and festival, with joy and gladness and cheerful feasts.

## **THE BAPTIST'S FAITHFUL WITNESS**

In like manner the parable had special meaning and force for the disciples of John. *They* held by *their* master's words. To them the Baptist was the last and greatest of the Prophets. And when the Baptist saw all men flocking to Jesus, he had said to his disciples: "Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice; this, my joy, therefore, is fulfilled." - John 3:28, 29.

The disciples of John could hardly fail to recall their master's words as they listened to the parable of Christ. And as they recalled them, they would see how even the austere, ascetic Baptist had claimed, as a son of the bridechamber, to rejoice greatly, while the Bridegroom was with him. And if he could do so, why could not they also?

Obviously there was a special force in the parable for both sets of critics. It referred the disciples of the Pharisees to Hebrew prophecies of a coming Messiah and Bridegroom, anointed with the oil of *joy* above his fellows, in whose days all fasting would cease; and it referred the disciples of the Baptist to the teaching and example of the Baptist himself to *his* prophecy of a Bridegroom, and his great joy as long as he stood and heard the Bridegroom's voice. So that, in place of meeting these austere and narrow-hearted critics in a temper as narrow and arrogant as their own, our Lord Jesus adopted their standards, condescended to their modes of thought, and sought to convince them *out of their own Scriptures -- leaving* us once again, an example, that we should *thus*, as well as in all other respects, seek to follow in his steps.

## **TRUE FASTING BY GOSPEL CHURCH**

But there is a deeper meaning in his next words, a meaning which neither the disciples of the Pharisees, nor the Baptist's disciples could grasp. As long as they have the Bridegroom with them, the children of the bridechamber cannot fast. *That* they were beginning to understand. "But the days will come," he continues, "when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then

shall they fast in those days. In these words it is evident that our Lord is thinking of the experiences of the true Gospel Church, of which the Jewish Church was but typical. Some of these disciples of his, members of the Jewish Church, would be transferred to the Gospel Church, and others would believe on him through their word, all down through the Gospel Age. Throughout these centuries he, their betrothed, would be absent. Now fasting is always associated with sorrow and trial, and as at times the long delay on the part of the Bridegroom would cause the heart of the waiting Church to grow sick and discouraged, she might well fast and doubtless would. But no one would need to urge this on her. It would not be a rite or ceremony imposed on the Church at certain solemn seasons, but the expression of a real sentiment of grief and weariness. It would proceed from the sorrow which the Church would feel in the absence of her Bridegroom, and is designed to lend intensity to her prayers and to insure with greater certainty that assistance of Jesus (the holy spirit in rich measure) which alone can supply the place of his visible presence. - Mark 9:29; Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23.

### **PARABLE OF THE OLD GARMENT WITH THE NEW PATCH**

To the parable of the bridechamber our Lord adds the parable of the old garment with the new-patch. "No man seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment; else the new piece that filleth it up taketh away from the old and the rent is made worse."

In this second parable our Lord again condescends to the imperfections of his critics, that he may lead them to think more accurately, and with a broader vision, of him, and of the work he has come to do. He states the view of the Law and of the Gospel which *they* (not he) held. To *them*, the Law was an old cloak, a religious garb, which they had long worn, and their fathers before them. They had honestly tried (at least some of them had) to clothe themselves in the righteousness which is by the Law. To a large extent its precepts had shaped their lives. Still, its ordinances were, for the most part, ordinances of outward observances, which had not vital, or vitalizing power. It could not, as St. Paul found out by bitter experience, give life. It was not graven on their hearts, but only on their phylacteries and door-posts -- on the hem of their garments. It did not touch, quicken, and renew their spirits; it was a mere robe, concealing rather than removing, the deformities and pollutions of their moral nature.

They did not themselves deny that it was an *old* cloak, getting somewhat thin and threadbare by long use. They were willing to have it patched; they were even trying to patch it themselves. The Pharisees, besides supplementing the written law by oral tradition, were willing to take a few hints from the teaching of John the Baptist. The disciples of the Baptist, though as a rule they did not become Christian, were willing to take a few hints from the teaching and example of Christ. They cut out a shred here and a shred there from the Gospel fabric, and were sewing them on to their old garment, the Law. But this feasting in Matthew's house perplexed them.

They could not tell what to make of it -- how to use it. It did not fit into any rent, or match with any texture, of their hereditary cloak. They were willing to take from Christ any form or custom which would make the Law more perfect or more suitable to the times; but this feasting with tax collectors and sinners -- what could they make of it? *This* would not give an added air of austerity or sanctity to their lives. It would neither make them more righteous, nor even give them a wider reputation for righteousness. It might even lessen the reputation they had. How could *this* patch be wrought in upon their old garment?

For their instruction our Lord adopts their view. Virtually he says to them: "You regard the law of Moses as an old cloak, a religious garb, rather than a religious life-form rather than spirit. And for you, this Gospel of mine is simply a new cloak, a new religious garb, another series of outward

forms. Be consistent, then. Do not spoil both cloaks by cutting a piece out of the new and sewing it on to the old. The new will not match with the old. The patch of new, - undressed, unfulled, cloth, sure to shrink when once it is wetted, will pull away from the frayed threads of the shrunk and long-worn garment, and the rent will grow worse than ever. Either wrap yourselves, as best you may, in the scanty folds of your ancient and tattered cloak, or fling that away, and accept in its place the new cloak, which, you are supposing, I have come to offer men."

### **PARABLE OF THE NEW WINE AND THE OLD WINESKINS**

Having thus taken their view, Jesus proceeds to give them his own view of both Law and Gospel in a third parable, the parable of the new wine and the old wineskins. To him, the Law was like old wine rather than like an old cloak -- wine which had not been without its refreshment and cheer to those who honestly sought to regulate their lives by it, even though it could never give them life; and the Gospel, so far from being a new cloak, a covering to be put on, was a new wine, a new vivifying spirit, to be put within men, making them strong and glad.

The wineskins, it would seem, would answer to the representatives of these two principles -- the Law and the Gospel. The Scribes and Pharisees at this time were sitting in Moses' seat. They were not divinely appointed to this service, but our Lord does not blame them for undertaking to instruct the people in reference to the mind and purposes of God, so long as they did not assume too much in consequence of what they were doing, and if they were consistent in themselves, conforming their conduct inner and outer, to the precepts of Moses and the instructions of the Prophets. But this they did not do, but, as our Lord stated, they "bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but they themselves did not move them with one of their fingers."

### **SELECTION OF NEW WINESKINS**

These were the representatives of the Law, at the time of Christ. They were the wineskins in which the old wine of the Law, sadly diluted by the precepts and commandments of men, was contained. The new wine of the Gospel represents the life-giving message which was to flow so abundantly through the teachings of Jesus. And the wineskins were the men who were to become the depositaries of this message, who were to preserve it for mankind. And whom, in Israel, will Jesus choose to fulfil this mission? The old practitioners of the Law? Pharisees puffed up with the idea of their own merit? Rabbis jaded with textual discussions? No, indeed! Such persons have nothing to learn, nothing to receive, from him. If associated with his Gospel, they would not fail to falsify it, by mixing up with his pure teaching, the old prejudices with which they were imbued; or even if they should yield their hearts, for a moment, to the lofty ideals of Jesus, it would put all their previous views and routine devotion utterly to rout, just as new and sparkling wine bursts a worn-out leathern or skin bottle. Where, then, shall he choose his future instruments? Among those who have neither merit nor wisdom of their own. He needs new wineskins, wineskins that will be able to stand the stress of the fermentation sure to come. He needs fresh souls, whose only merit is their receptivity, new men in Christ, new creatures in Christ Jesus. "God," prayed he on one occasion, "I thank thee, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes." (Luke 10:21.) These babes will save the truth, and it will save them. This thought is expressed in the words "new wine must be put into new bottles, and both [that is, both wine and wineskins] are preserved."

## TRUTH OF GOSPEL CANNOT BE RESTRAINED

In other words our Lord teaches them that it would be worse than useless to endeavor to restrain, within the limits of their traditions and ritualisms, the powers and graces of the new life which he came to bestow. *That* life could not endure to be confined within limits so narrow, by restraints so feeble. It would rend them asunder. The new wine must be put into new skins.

Fast! Of course, under appropriate circumstances. But his disciples should neither fast nor feast by rule, in deference to mere customs, however antique and venerable, which did not naturally express their inward life. They should be fettered by no ancient law graven on stones or inscribed on parchments, but should simply act out the laws of the life implanted by the Gospel in their hearts. While he, the Bridegroom, was with them, it was natural and right that they should make Merry and be glad; when he was taken away, it would be natural and right that they should mourn and fast. Let them in each case, in every case, follow the impulse of their renewed spirits. For himself and for them, he claimed freedom; freedom of thought, of emotion, of action. Austere, ascetic John the Baptist is not their ideal, still less the Pharisee, however learned, and punctilious. They are to honor, not a hermit, nor a ritualist, but a Man, the Man Christ Jesus. *He* is to be their ideal, and they are to serve him *as their hearts prompt* in perfect liberty. He is their life, and his life in them may be safely left to manifest itself in all innocent, comely, and appropriate forms.

It is a question here, then, of the preservation of the Gospel, and of the salvation of the individuals who are to be the depositaries of it. The old wineskins, men such as these carping, criticizing, Pharisees and rabbis of Judaism will not do. Mere babes, such as this tax-collector, Matthew, and his associates, will do better.

Later on, we find this teaching which our Lord here presents in germ, in the form of a parable, expanded by St. Paul's labors, when, on a larger scale, the Gospel passed, from the Jews (as a nation) to, Gentiles, to those who, out of every kindred, tribe and nation, engage in the glorious ministry of the Gospel of his grace.

It is interesting, too, to notice, that this same question, namely, the preservation of the Gospel, and the selection of those fitted to engage in its ministry, has recurred again and again, since then; and, each time after a period of falling away, the Gospel has been given again, and has seemed like new wine in its power to reinvigorate those whose hearts were ready for it. Each time too, the old wineskins were rejected-new wineskins had to be found. Luther and others of the Reformers were doubtless the new wineskins when the great Protestant Reformation had its beginning. In our own day, the day of Protestantism's decline, who that is at all acquainted with the facts fails to realize that our dear Brother Russell was selected as a fit vessel, a new wineskin, to preserve and uphold the glorious Gospel, all the wondrous features of which he clearly saw, and plainly stated, in the harmonious unfolding of the Divine Plan of the Ages, in which we all so greatly rejoice? How, certain it is, too, that the old wineskins, the leaders of nominal Christianity, with all due respect to a few devout souls amongst them, were in no condition, for 'this service, and had to be rejected for the same reasons that obtained amongst the Jewish leaders at our Lord's first advent? How careful, too, should we be today, who have been permitted to engage in this same ministry, that we continue to prove ourselves worthy thereof, lest it be taken from us, and given to others more worthy, and more appreciative of the honor!



## **OUR LORD'S GRACE TOWARD THOSE SLOW TO ACCEPT HIM AND HIS TEACHINGS**

Thus, then, by three exquisite parables, our Lord. Jesus vindicates his disciples and himself. But has he no thought, no tenderness, for any disciples than his own? Yes; indeed he has. For, having vindicated his own, he instantly begins to make excuse for the disciples of John and of the Pharisees. "No man," says he, "having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new; for, he saith, The old is better." - Luke 5:39.

And here we have one of the most gracious touches in this table-talk about weddings and feasts, old garments and new wine; for it comes to this: A man loves his old cloak and his old wine. He has grown used to them; he has many pleasant associations with them. He likes the old garment, which habit has made easy; it is better to him than a new garment, even though the new be of finer material, and cut more in the fashion of the time. He likes the taste of the old wine, which he has had in his cellar many years, and to which he has grown accustomed, better than that of the new wine, however superior may be its quality. New wine, however others may praise it, is always repugnant to the palate of a man accustomed to wine, the roughness of which has been softened by age.

In like manner old habits of thought and worship, old customs and forms are not easily given up even in favor of more excellent habits, even though God himself has sent new methods and new opportunities. The Pharisees were used to their rites, their ceremonies, their traditions. It was not easy for them to give up the religious habits in which they had been bred, with which their names had been honorably associated; and our Lord patiently allows for the force of custom. He admits that it must be hard for them to turn away from the old wine they had drunk so long, even to take to a better wine. Hence he will not have the rabbis and their disciples hurried to a decision. It was very natural for them that they should hesitate to renounce the old Law for the new Gospel, that they should want to patch up the old garment a little longer, and to pour the new wine into the old skin. The Law had come to them from God; it was the Law of the Lord; they knew that, and were sure of it. The Gospel also came from God, but they were not sure of that yet. Let them wait, and put it to the proof. As yet it was early times with them. Christ had not long taught in their streets, nor done many of his mighty works "among them; and because he knew how custom clings to men, and how new his words were to these men as yet, he virtually says to them: "Take time and thought. The whole habit and bent of your lives cannot be altered in a day. I do not expect you straightway to accept my words. You are quite right in not accepting them until you know that I too am come forth from God; and I can wait until you do."

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

How many, and how weighty, are the subjects for reflection suggested by the talk at Matthew's table. It suggests, first, that whatever the sorrows by which we may be tried, there is set before us a joy capable of sustaining us under all the sorrows and fluctuations of time; and that having this joy we should let it give a festal tone to our lives-lives which would otherwise be overcast with sadness. It suggests, in the second place, that the true ritualism, the service in which we best express Christian piety, consists of love and holiness; that it lies, not in our scrupulous observance of ecclesiastical forms, but in acts of kindness, and neighborly good will, and in keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. It suggests in the third place, that we are neither to impose our conceptions of truth and duty on our brethren, nor to submit to them when they try to impose their conceptions on us; but that, walking in the holy freedom which bows to no spiritual authority save that of Christ, we are to act out our own views of truth and duty, and to cheerfully accord to others the freedom we claim for ourselves. And finally it suggests that in our endeavors to minister the Gospel to others, either in the Church or in the world, we are to proceed warily and patiently, remembering that it is only as our labors have the cooperation of God's holy spirit that any lasting result, whether in ourselves or in others, may be secured.

- P. L. Read.

## **"The Word of God"**

*"The Word of God is quick and powerful." - Hebrews 4:12.*

THIS is one of the great texts of the Bible -- a statement of truth at once profound and inexhaustible. It has its source in the personality of God himself, its channel in the person of the Logos -- in later times our Lord Jesus Christ -- and its concluding effects in those inexplicable experiences in his saints where conscience reigns supreme.

Sometimes it is applied to the Holy Book which we affectionately term the Bible, and, as a consequence, an aura of sanctity is accorded to the Book in a most exclusive sense, a sanctity accorded to no other book no matter how it may have helped in the molding of our lives. The reading of the Bible is held by all good men to be infinitely more essential to our growth in knowledge and in grace than the reading of the best commentaries and dissertations that the world's libraries contain. And experience has proved, and still continues to prove, that comparative assertion true.

But the text contains much more than a reference to the printed book, peerless and incomparable though the book may be. The Word of God may be embodied "in" the words of the book, but it is much more than the words. It is the living thought of God, seeking to reveal and disclose itself through the languages of men.

It is most essential that we remember its place as it stands in the argument of this Epistle. It begins with the great idea of "God speaking," and it is this great idea which carries through to our text. "The Word of God" maintains the idea of "God speaking" still.

In the introductory passage of Chapter One, we read that God "at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets," and that "in these last times" he has been speaking unto us *by* a Son -- literally "in" a Son. Neither the Prophets nor the Son spake "of" or "from" themselves, but only as God gave them utterance.

We cannot read this first section of Hebrews without being reminded of the first words in Genesis: "In the beginning, God." In that place and in this -- indeed, in every place in Holy Writ, that is the first implication. The first step in faith is to believe that God "is"; the next to believe that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.

Later he spake through Moses and Joshua -- then came the long line of prophets, priests, and two kings. The statement of the writer passes under review these methods of the "time past" angels, leaders, prophets, and priests, and then proceeds to set in contrast with them all, the ministry of the Son.

All through the "time past," the word spoken was the "Word of God," not only the word of prophet, priest, or king. When they thundered forth the arresting words, "Thus saith the Lord," it was intended to blazon forth the fact that it was the declaration of God, through the prophet's lips, and that it would be avouched and underwritten by the act of God, if necessary. As such, it cowed and subdued haughty king or stubborn peasantry. All Scripture given by inspiration was the Word of God, and as such emanated and flowed forth from the mind of God.

## **THE MESSAGE SUPREME**

Not less is this true when the mind of God was and is expressed in or through "the Son." Jesus came to earth as his "messenger," bringing with him words and thoughts which had been given him by his Father. "I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him ... as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. . . . I speak that which I have seen with my Father.... He that is of God heareth God's words." - John 8:26, 28, 38, 47.

"The Word of God" in our text is, therefore, "God still speaking" through his appointed messenger. That it is still personal (a messenger), and not theoretical (a message) is amply demonstrated by the next verse: "Him with whom we have to do," from whose "sight" nothing can be hid. Whether the "him" here described is God, or Jesus, makes no difference to the force or sense of the passage, though the connections within and following the text incline one to say that the person of our Lord Jesus, as the great High Priest, is intended.

But every messenger must have a message and must deliver it faithfully if sender, messenger, and message are to operate as one. Hence, though differentiation between them is very necessary in order that they may be seen in their respective relationships to each other, cohering is just as necessary for the allocation of final authority for what is being said.

In the "time past" God's message had been tentative and fragmentary; in these "last days" it is final and complete. Not that all men have heard or will hear it during this present Church period. None the less the finality of God's speech to men through his Son is most definitely asserted in the opening passages, and argued for throughout the whole range of the Epistle. There is never to be another Messenger, but the delivery of the message is to be according to the times, and according to the needs of the men involved. Thus the Messenger has a message today appropriate for this Gospel Age, but, at its close, a further installment of the message, appropriate to the Age to come, will be made by him, and by those acting under him. This is quite in line with the time factors of the Book of Hebrews -- it begins by speaking of the "world to come whereof we speak" (Heb. 2:5); it depicts some of the blessings which the true believer enjoys as "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5); it encourages believers to wait patiently under present distress "yet a little while" till "he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37); while its final picture is that of the complete gathering to Mount Zion of the whole assembly of the Elect Church, of just men made perfect (Ancient Worthies), of a New Covenant (newly made), of God as the judge of all (or alternatively as a judge who is God of all), and of Jesus, the illustrious One who has mediated the newly made Covenant between God and the House of Israel (Heb. 12:22-24); and all this long period is the "speaking period" of God, by the Son, which, in one single brief word is descriptively styled "Today" (Heb. 4:7) -- a "today" spanning the centuries from Jesus' baptism long ago, to that better day, when, Israel gathered and restored, is fit and ready to enter again into Covenant relationship with her God.

## **A BOOK, A PERSONALITY, A MESSAGE**

The Word (Logos) of God is thus not merely a Book but a Personality, the Living Word -- plus the message which proceeds from his mouth at this or that stage of the Plan, according as need requires. That this message has been embodied in a book is a fact no enlightened student of its pages will dispute, but that the message is there for all and sundry to take at their wish is not true. Thousands read the Holy Book, but it yields no message to them. Thousands more dissect and carve it up -- this part to J, that part to P, etc., etc. - but it falls to pieces, meaningless and purposeless in their hands. Others use it to pile text on text to prove what they desire, only to find fetters and shackles firm -- riveted on heart and mind. The truth of the matter is that the Book is a textbook, but it needs a Teacher to explain it. And that Teacher is the one chosen by God, long ago. God's illuminating power (his holy spirit) acting on the spoken (and written) Word makes it live and operate; without that holy power the Book is dead. Without that power it is of no greater influence than the works of Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, or other earthly sage. The message without its Messenger and Author is impotent, inert, and pointless, and does not do the work it was sent to do.

But with the Messenger and Author behind it (or with it), how amazingly and wonderfully it operates! It dissects and divides between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow, and discerns even the very thoughts and intents of the heart.

The word -- picture here is drawn from the thoroughness and carefulness of the priestly scrutiny as he slew and prepared the animal for sacrifice. The word *tetrachelismena* from *trachelizo* in verse 13 (opened to the eyes of him) means to "bend back the neck" and thus leave the throat exposed. This was the first stage of the sacrificial work as the priest brought down the keen blade upon the throat of the victim stretched before him. With the same keen blade the priest, after proper drainage of the blood, proceeded to dissect joint from joint, organ from organ, opening up to view even the marrow in the bones.

Every hair was searched, every joint examined, every organ scrutinized with extreme thoroughness, and thus, the priest himself satisfied, the freewill gift was passed and permitted to be offered to God in worship and sacrifice. The internal economy of the lamb (or other animal) was set naked and opened before the eyes of the sacrificing priest.

Thus is the believer opened up before the eyes of him with whom we have to do, by the sharp cutting instrument, sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word of God -- the Living Personality of the great High Priest -- opens up for scrutiny and inspection the surrendered personality of the saint, by the sharp cutting action of his Holy Word, separating between the desires of the flesh and those of the spirit -- the new creature. It divides between those emotions and intentions springing from the exercise of our five natural senses -- seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching -- whereby we influence or are influenced by our fellowmen, and their spiritual counterparts, by means of which we are able to hold communion with God. Then the figurative application of the joints and the marrow could well represent the difference between the form and the essence, the extrinsic and the intrinsic appearance of every act, word, or thought.

## DISCERNER OF THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART

Thus, there is no act or word or thought, nor any motive, emotion, or intent which is beyond the sharp -- cutting edge of the Word of God. It is a discerner (Greek, *kritikos*, able to judge) of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It can thus sit in judgment, in the seat of conscience, upon belief and unbelief, upon right -- doing and wrong, upon true thinking and false, and determine for us the uprightness or deceit of every motion of the soul. With a balance more infinitely sensitive than the apothecary's scales it can weigh up the righteousness or unrighteousness of every intent, and indicate to which side our leaning inclines.

"Quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" . . . Christ Jesus our Lord is very concerned about these, because what a man thinks, that he will be sooner or later, in life. We must expect to have our most secret thoughts, relations, and purposes questioned, criticized, and measured by Jesus, the Living Word, through the precepts of the Bible -- the written Word. No court of inquiry was ever presided over by a more exacting Inquisitor than this. He is the critic of all the secrets of the heart, and as each thought or intention rises and begins to take effect, he searches it through and through.

Where does the intangible line of demarcation between soul and spirit come? Where does the one end and the other begin? We cannot tell, but the Word of God knows! For instance, if we are tired and overwrought, would the claims of the natural life have precedence over those of the new creature? -- tired to go to the Class meeting, but not too tired to go to work! Or that use of our resources? -- too much to give for a spiritual cause, but not too much to spend on ourselves! Or that artistic mood? -- too boring to sing a hymn of praise, but not too boring to play Mendelssohn or Mozart, *et al!*

Here is the battle -- ground for the child of God, and the conflict must last to his dying day. Spiritual seeing versus natural seeing; spiritual hearing versus natural hearing; spiritual tasting versus natural tasting; spiritual feeling versus natural feeling; spiritual touch versus natural touch -- which shall it be? And yet: it need not be the one or the other exclusively, so long as they are rightly placed and suitably followed. There is no criminality in our weariness and tiredness so long as it deters us from the natural as from the spiritual exercise. There is no wrong in the use of our resources if the spiritual receives not less attention than the natural. Good clothes, good furnishings, and good holidays can all be bought to the glory of God. Nor is there anything inappropriate in playing Mozart and Mendelssohn, if thereby a song of praise to the Most High is evoked.

It is to enable us to attain that end, and find the right balance between soul and spirit, between natural man and new creature, that the Word of God has come to preside in our lives. He has come to deal with the causes of unrest in the human compound personality. If strange and contradictory complexes lie at the center of our restlessness, he has come to disentangle them and set them in their right relationship. He enters and supervises the whole personality, distinguishing between what is spiritual and what is not, and determines for us not only what is right and true, but also what is best and life-promoting.

His dissecting knife bespeaks a life of sacrifice, it cuts part away from part, so that it may be laid in lowly worship before the Most High, yet, contemporaneously, his presiding Personality, dwelling in our inmost heart, separates, disentangles, and loosens up all the jangling, discordant, restless complexes, and brings them all to rest, straightened out, adjusted, balanced, because they find their place of rest in him.

Do not dread or fear the incoming of the Word of God into your heart of hearts, for close after these searching, scorching words, come those of comfort and hope. "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Our Redeemer has passed this way too. The Word of God in his heart searched him out through and through. He too lay like the flayed, dissected victim 'neath his Father's searching gaze, as part after part was scrutinized, as joint and marrow were opened up and laid bare. But, thank God, there was no flaw or blemish in him. Soul and spirit, the natural and the spiritual, were at equipoise and rest in him.

His yoke was easy and his burden light; he touched life's deepest chords and was broken thereby. But for him the Cross was the prelude to the Crown. The reproaches of men broke his heart, but in that breaking he came to understand broken hearts, and thus it is that he is able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him. Our hearts must be broken too if we are to help heal broken hearts in a coming day, but while they are on the breaking wheel, he is near to help and sustain. "He was tempted in all points like as we are," and thus he knows and cares.

The chosen High Priest of God has been given a twofold work on our behalf. He must slay and dissect our sacrifice; he must also comfort and console those that bring the sacrifice. In Israel, in time past, a goat, a lamb, or a bird suffered as the one; the presented of the goat, the lamb, or bird enjoyed the other. In these "last days" the twofold experience befalls the same man. He must bring himself as lamb, goat, or bird, and be slain as a man, but thank God, the same Hands that occasion his death, also wipe away his tears, soothe his fears, and set his heart to rest with the comfort of the Lord. Oh! that he may ever be to us the Word of God ... and our great High Priest, searching and comforting us simultaneously!

-- *T. Holmes*, Eng.

## Discipline

*"Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son,  
so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." - Deut. 8:5.*

IN THE words of *one* observer "We are living in an undisciplined age. The old disciplines are breaking down, and *the* foundations of *society are* therefore crumbling. The discipline of the home seems to be vanishing in the new psychology which teaches 'parents, obey your children.' The discipline of the schoolroom is becoming unpopular according to the so-called Progressive Education, lest the personality of the child be thwarted by the imposition of a will higher than his own.

"Above all, the disciplines of divine grace are derided as legalism, or are entirely unknown to a generation that is largely illiterate as to the Scriptures.

"We need *the* rugged strength of Christian character that can come only from discipline, the discipline of spirit, of mind, of body, and of society. Otherwise, the home will lose its heart as well as its hearth, the schoolroom its strength and the textbooks their exactness, the Scriptures their sanction."

We do not share in the expectation that the trend will stop this side of a complete breakdown of the present social order, prior to the setting up of the Kingdom, at which time Kingdom laws will require disciplines rightly directed, which will have the desired effect in character development.

The thought of Christian discipline runs counter to the tendency of the fallen nature, and is therefore generally unpopular. Discipline, as such, is variously employed by all who hope that by its use they may the more quickly attain to a desired goal in such fields as scholastics, athletics, science, etc. In all of these fields we may find individuals who deprive themselves of many luxuries and comforts of life in order to complete a course of study that will fit them for their life's work, and a fair opportunity of attaining eminence in their particular field. The scholar will burn "midnight oil" in pursuit of knowledge. The athlete will submit to the most rigorous training whilst denying himself the pleasure of indulging his appetites. The scientist loses all consciousness of time and awareness of social responsibilities in pursuit of his laboratory experiments. In each case their interest or goal takes precedence over every other consideration. Would that every professing Christian would apply the same energy and zeal, the same oneness of purpose in living the Christ-life. The way would then not seem so hard or rough, nor the course so long as it appears to those who enter it half-heartedly and travel it with faltering steps.

Christian education has taught all of us the need for discipline in our daily life, and if self-applied will render less necessary those divinely directed experiences that are calculated to impress needed lessons upon our minds and hearts, some of which are not as pleasant as we would like them to be. If we persist in ignoring the opportunities for sacrifice and self-denial while walking in the narrow way, we should not be surprised if disciplinary experiences are permitted in order to awaken us to a deeper appreciation of our responsibilities.

## EXPERIENCES THAT DISCIPLINE

What experiences in life serve as disciplinary in our Christian walk! Our first step in response to the call involves a degree of discipline that is at once apparent, and suggested by the words of Jesus: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Discipleship means discipline; the two words have a common root. The disciple is that one who has been taught or trained by the Master, having heeded his call, "Come unto me." Discipleship requires the discipline of conversion. Recognizing our lost estate because of rebellion against God, we come in repentance to our Lord Jesus, assenting with our hearts to the facts that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isa. 53:6); that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); that "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin" (Gal. 3:22); and that we "were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" "strangers from the covenants of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:3, 12.) Such an admission requires a measure of discipline, for it is difficult for the natural heart to humble itself to admit of its sin and shame, and the need for the provision made for us in Christ Jesus.

Discipline comes also in the consideration of the cost of discipleship. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me-, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:37.) This is further exemplified in Luke 14:26, where the Master says, "If any man come after me and hate not his father and mother, wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." This is strong language. What can be the meaning of it? We know that love is the very essence of the character of our God and of our Lord Jesus whom we are endeavoring to follow. How then can we interpret such instruction in connection with discipleship? Does it not mean that we are to make our Lord Jesus supreme, permanent, and preeminent in our heart, so that no person, no thing, shares that place in our life? No person, no possession, nor life itself is too great to surrender for his sake.

This is doubtless the reason why Jesus advised each one considering discipleship to sit down first and count the cost. (Luke 14:28.) This denial of all, including ourselves, is the greatest of all disciplines. There are those who are dearer to us than life itself, but they should not be dearer than the Savior. For him and his cause we have died to these and to every other earthly creature or pleasure. It is "Jesus only!" And the step should not be taken lightly or thoughtlessly, as is illustrated in Luke 14:28-33.

Discipleship also requires the discipline of cross-bearing, one of the three things considered a daily necessity: our daily bread, our daily work, our daily cross. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23.) "And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27.) This cross is not that which our Savior bore to Calvary. We are, however, privileged to join with him insofar as self-denial is concerned, as seen in his ministry from Jordan to Calvary. It was the Son's chief delight to do the Father's will, and should it not therefore be ours also? The attainment of this standard will mean self-denial in the deepest sense of the word.

"I take, O cross, thy shadow  
For my abiding place;  
I ask no other sunshine than  
The sunshine of His face;  
Content to let the world go by,  
To know no gain nor loss,  
My sinful self my only shame,  
My glory all the cross!"



In Hebrews 12 the question of discipline comes up for consideration. Here the Apostle advises all to consider the great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and to lay aside every encumbrance and the close girding sin, to run with patience the course marked out for us, looking not at self, but away from self to the Leader or Perfecter of our faith. His great motive was the *joy* that was set before him, enabling him to endure the cross and to disregard the shame. His chief delight was the doing of the Father's will. As he expressed it: "My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me." I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. "

The Apostle urges us to consider Him attentively, and to note the opposition that he endured from his own people in order that we may not be wearied, nor discouraged, when brought face to face with the same difficulties, pointing out at the same time that we have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin.

We are then reminded of an Old Testament Scripture which carries an obvious truth: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. " (Prov. 3 11, 12.) And "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord chasteneth thee." - Deut. 8:5.

The Diaglott rendering of this Old Testament Scripture, as quoted in Hebrews 12:5, 6, uses the word discipline as follows: "My son, slight not the discipline of the Lord, neither be discouraged when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure discipline, God deals with you as with sons. For is there any son whom a father does not discipline? "

### **DISCIPLINE A SIGN OF THE FATHER'S LOVE**

These Scriptures are suggestive of a close and remarkable relationship which exists between the believer and his God and Heavenly Father, pointing out the fact that discipline is based on love. This makes it more educational than punitive. In other words, it is for our Christian development and not merely for punishment. If there is no discipline in the Christian life, then we may have reason to feel concerned about our being true sons. "But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then are ye spurious and not sons." All of us have been subject to parental discipline in our early years, some of which, administered with the aid of "the rod," doubtless left a lasting impression, and very likely caused us to hold the parent in high regard, since we doubtless knew that the discipline was deserved, although it may not have been administered in the proper spirit. How much more satisfactory, then, to submit ourselves to the Father of spirits and live. Our earthly parents disciplined us in the way that seemed right to them, but the Heavenly Father disciplines for our advantage, in order that we may partake of his holiness. No discipline as it relates to the present seems to be joyous, but rather grievous, "yet afterwards it returns the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

### **LESSONS FROM THE DISCIPLINING OF MOSES**

We may gain some helpful lessons on this subject by considering the experiences of Moses and the children of Israel in their deliverance from Egypt, and in their wilderness wanderings. The story of Moses reveals divine oversight and protection in the preparation of one destined to play a most important role in the affairs of Israel. Educated in the palace of Pharaoh in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, Moses came to a time of life when it became necessary to make a most important decision, and "He chose to suffer the reproaches of his own people rather than enjoy the pleasures

of sin for a season." Did this require discipline? It is obvious that for the advantage of the flesh, the thing for Moses to have done would have been to remain where he was and perhaps one day be a Pharaoh himself, and then by reason of his high position and mighty authority be able to emancipate the entire host of Israel. Is it not possible that some such thought occurred to him? His decision to abandon any hope of promotion in Pharaoh's court in favor of a less prominent position, and even one of reproach, shows a strength of character that would lend itself very easily to divine leading. He here displays a meekness that is precious in the sight of the Lord. "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." In this attitude Moses was teachable as subsequent events proved well.

First, however, he must learn the lesson of dependence on God, and waiting on him for instruction. This was very soon forthcoming when Moses, with very grave consequences, essayed to settle the personal quarrels and strivings of one of his own people with an Egyptian. The second attempt along this line resulted in Moses fleeing from Egypt to the land of Midian, where he almost drops from sight for forty years, during which time he tended the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. We should not assume either that they were wasted years even though spent at such a menial task as being a shepherd. Some of the world's great men have been those who were privileged to learn the lessons of discipline, amid the scenes of pasturelands, while caring for such submissive creatures as sheep.

Forty years seems to be a very long time, and how interesting that its end coincided with the end of the prophesied period of Israel's bondage, which meant that Moses' preparation for the divinely appointed task was completed. This was signalized by a very remarkable event. There in the quietness of the desert a bush broke into flame, but, wonder of wonders, the bush was not consumed. Still more awful was the voice that came from the midst of the burning bush, "Moses, Moses." Moses replied, "Here am I," and the voice said, "Remove thy shoes from off thy feet for the place where thou standest is holy ground." This dialogue evidently illustrates the need for discipline in reverence.

Thus begins a new chapter in the life of one who in the years to come was to learn more and more concerning the disciplines of the Lord and the inestimable privileges of communion and fellowship that were necessary in order to fit and sustain him for the tremendous tasks that lay ahead.

Now the entire history of these great events presents a most interesting picture or type of the deliverance of the Church from the powers of Satan and the world as represented by Pharaoh and Egypt. Instructions divinely given were followed out to the last detail in the preparations for departure, so that when the final blow was struck and the "first born" of the land of Egypt fell under the power of the "angel of death," their taskmasters and rulers, including hard-hearted Pharaoh himself, were only too glad to let them go. So they came out, 600,000 men, besides women and children, with great substance because the Egyptians loaded them with jewels and gold and silver, so much so that they spoiled the Egyptians.

It is here that their discipline as a nation began, and very soon we find them confronted with a most distressing situation, and one in which their faith was sorely tried. With the Red Sea before them, hemmed in on both sides by mountains, and with Pharaoh's hosts in hot pursuit coming up on their rear, things looked very grim indeed, so much so that the people lost heart and began to murmur against Moses. "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us? . . . It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Surely there is here a deep lesson for all who have come under the blood and taken up the cross to follow in the footsteps of the Master.

In Numbers 11:1 we are told "And when the people complained it displeased the Lord." Is it any less displeasing to him for us to fail in the same way? "Godliness with contentment is great gain." Discontentment disregards the divine presence promised to the Lord's own. In their wilderness journey the children of Israel had the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to go before them in the way, to defend them from their foes, to show them where they should pitch their tents and when and where they should journey. These were the outward, visible assurances of divine presence. By day or night they had only to look to the pillar above the Tabernacle to receive that assurance. To Moses had been given the encouraging promise: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

In the New Testament times since the days of the Apostles, we have no visible indications of his presence with his people, but we have the strong and sure promises of the Savior, "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me," and, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." This is effected by the holy spirit and its work in the hearts of his people. So when we become discontented, we give evidence of a lack of that spirit. Discontent is an outward evidence of lack of faith in the promises of God. The children of Israel had been led out of the iron furnace of Egypt by the strong hand of God to go to the land promised unto their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When dissatisfaction gripped their spirit, they "despised the pleasant land," and remembered only "the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and garlic." Complaint caused them to prefer these in Egypt's hard bondage, to freedom in a land flowing with milk and honey. Discontentment discounts the provision God makes for us. For the children of Israel there was the daily bread day by day in the form of manna, enough for everybody. To the hungry, grateful people to whom it came, it was like the coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. When they became disgruntled they could say, "But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna before our eyes." By that time the taste of it was like the taste of fresh oil -- the taste of honey when they were delighted, and the taste of fresh oil when they were discontented.

Does this alteration of taste caused by a change of attitude seem altogether far-fetched, or do we remember seasons when the Word of God was exceedingly sweet to our taste, and then, when under a cloud of complaint we found it tasteless and commonplace? Discontentment displeases God, and our relationship to him can be so marred by it that our progress is greatly retarded and our pilgrimage made much more difficult. This, of course, is a lack of faith. Of Israel it is said, "they believed not his word, but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord."

Discontentment may be a part of our disposition, but contentment can become a major characteristic of our Christian life. The Apostle Paul said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

The discipline of discontentment is to turn from a complaining spirit, from criticism that corrodes and the dissatisfaction that displeases God, to a thankful attitude, to faith and praise, that will be pleasing to him who said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." We may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

Bunyan paints a colorful portrait of contentment in his description of the shepherd boy in the valley of humiliation: "Now as they were going along and talking they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep. The boy was in very mean clothes, but of a very fresh and well favored countenance; and as he sat by himself he sang:

'He that is down, need fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride.

He that is humble, ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.  
I am content with what I have,  
Little be it, or much;  
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,  
Because thou savest such,  
Fullness to such a burden is,  
That go on pilgrimage;  
Here little, and hereafter bliss  
Is best from age to age."

If we have to any degree succumbed to the spirit of the times, which is restlessness and discontent, the need for discipline is very urgent; and much good may result from mentally retracing our steps from the time we first enrolled in the school of discipleship to the present moment. Perhaps our sense of values has changed since first we sat down and counted the cost. If this be true, the cross will have become heavier as time has gone on, and the tendency to lay it down more marked. Let us then consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest we be weary and faint in our minds; and in addition let us note the sense of values expressed by the great Apostle Paul in the words: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

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No doubt Paul suffered more for the sake of the Gospel than any other, person, save the Lord Jesus himself. Paul never lost his keen appreciation of what the Master had suffered for him, nor did he ever let slide away the vision of the glory that was to be revealed when the spirit that had so quickened him would, be poured out upon all flesh.

Moses *too* was one whose sense of values enabled him to enter the way of the surrendered life in order that he might serve the Living God. Nor did he *lay* down the privilege of carrying out the divine directions until *his mission* was accomplished. *We* detect *no* note of disappointment *or* dissatisfaction coming from Mount Pisgah, but rather the acquiescence of a meek and quiet spirit as, Moses is brought to the close of a life of service and discipline.

The true disciple is the one who sees in all of life's affairs the supervisory and overruling, hand of the One who has enrolled him in the School of Christ, even our Heavenly Father; and if the lessons in that school be disciplinary even to, the point of scourging, the response. should *be*

"Content whatever lot I see,  
Since 'tis God's hand that leadeth me."

- J. B. Webster

## Perfected Through Suffering

The following is taken from a letter written by a patient in a "Home for Incurables" to a sister who visits, the Home and was used of the Lord to introduce His Plan of Salvation to his young brother and some of his associates, and thus bring much comfort and joy to these dear ones. We might add that regular meetings are held in this Home, and when a Pilgrim visits the Class he has the privilege of serving these friends and giving comfort and refreshment as well as receiving encouragement from them and their glad response to the Message:

Dear Sister:

I have had many experiences in the past year, and some I never want to live over, but I feel that all of my experiences have been for my good and that they have yielded the peaceable fruits of righteousness to, a degree. Anyway, I feel in my heart that I know more of Gods love, and the real things are more important to me now than ever before in my life; and I am determined to enter the New Year with the thought of being more pleasing to God. I make so many mistakes, but God is really my life. I know he is giving me strength when everything else falls. He keeps me up and able to be what I am to my friends and the people who visit me.

The Christian way is a wonderful way, and it is not a weak way. A Christian has every experience, but he also has God's power and strength, which is worth all the world a million times. I can ache and suffer so much, but when I see some of my friends faces whom God has blessed me with, immediately I feel a sense of responsibility that is greater than any pain, and I have a joy that nothing can take away. It is true that I get weak at times, but God is giving me all I need to make me worthy of his Kingdom, so all I ask for is his strength to bear my cross, whatever it may be.

I am beginning to realize that this life is wonderful, and death is wonderful, and the resurrection is even more wonderful. To me life used to mean one thing, and that was suffering; and death was even worse. I believed that the good people were going to heaven and the bad ones to hell. I knew I was bad, and was ill tempered because I couldn't help it, and didn't think it was my fault. But now, thanks to God, he has seen fit to show me the meaning of life and death and a little of the hereafter. Life, with the knowledge of God, is a great and wonderful thing, and each day is a day of learning and of rejoicing. Each tear has a place, and so does each smile. A Christian should never just take anything for granted. In every word is a lesson; and in every experience is an opportunity: Death is when our schooling is finished, and we have paid our debt or price of sin, and Satan has no more influence over us. This, to me, is wonderful to know. The next voice we hear will be that of Jesus calling us to be with him; and Paul and John say that we shall see him as he is. , This will be a happy time, not only for those who have learned their lessons here., but it will be for all mankind; and who knows-we may hear those angels sing of "Peace on earth, good will to men" again, and this time it will be a reality.

These- are my hopes and dreams, and they are what hold me up. Anything else I might do or say is false, but this isn't. The things of God are always new and real the other things are old and shabby. They are a part of an earthen vessel which contains a tiny spark of the spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known."

May God bless us in the new year and help us to walk closer to him day by day, is my prayer.

J. B. -- Va.

## **Items of Interest**

### **New Edition of Hymnal**

Plans are completed for the publishing of a new edition of our "Hymns of Millennial Dawn," with many additions, and also whatever possible, music well known and loved by our English brethren being substituted. Friends in the States will doubtless consider the tunes superior to the present ones in most instances as well as more reverential. The brethren publishing this edition cannot know what the price will be until they know the approximate number to be printed. A prompt sending in of your orders will therefore be appreciated. The price may be as high as \$4.20 per copy, but the Brethren hope for enough advance orders that it may be sold in America for \$2.80.

You may send your orders to Midland Group, c/o Mr. G. E. "Chivers, The Haven, Oldbury Road, Hartshill, Nuneaton, England. (The postage on letters to England is now eight cents.) Or the orders may be sent to us.

## **Recently Deceased**

- Sr. Levina B. Daigh, Seattle, Wash. - (Nov.)
- Sr. Gertrude Eiber, Kent, Ohio - (Nov.)
- Sr. Edna Eichlin, Easton, Pa. (Oct.)
- Sr. Grace A. Hollister, Brooklyn, N. Y. - (Nov.)
- Br. Lapinski, Wallingford, Conn. - (Nov.)
- Br. Andrew Larson, Pueblo, Colo. - (Oct.)
- Sr. Clyde Lorenz, Baldwin Park, Cal. - (Nov.)
- Sr. Alice McGlashan, Chicago, Ill. - (Nov.)
- Sr. Sylvia Mendenhall, Denver, Col. - (Nov.)
- Sr. Dorothy Milner, Columbus, Ohio - (Nov.)
- Sr. Lola Payne, Richmond, Va. - (Nov.)
- Br. Christian Ruesch, Kamloops, B.C. - (Nov.)
- Br. Andrew Shirk, Dayton, Ohio - (Nov.)
- Sr. Florence Snyder, Chicago, Ill. - (June)
- Br. J. H. Sonntag, Dorchester, Mass. - (Dec.)