

Megiddo Message

Vol. 79, No. 4
April 1992



*Can anyone measure
the magnificence of God?
—Psalm 145:3*

WELCOME NEW YEAR!

The new year means extended time. And extended time means life. And life for us means opportunity, opportunity to grow, to improve, to change from the old creature to the new, from the natural man of the flesh to the new man being created in righteousness and true holiness.

There is so much to do, so much to learn, so much to live for in the vast purposes of God. For we are not creatures of chance, we are not here simply to live our little lives and die. We are here to make something of ourselves that our Creator can use in His eternal scheme. He who has given us life has given us also the potential to grow, to become. And so He calls us to new heights of holiness, and new dimensions of commitment in prospect of things "far more exceeding and eternal" (II Cor. 4:17).

So let us say, Welcome, New Year!

Seen from this standpoint, the new year is positive good. But it will also have negatives. For our world is not yet the perfect world, nor are we yet the perfect individuals God has called us to be.

Looking around we see everywhere the corruption of a sin-laden society. The marks of the collapse of morality, the degrading pit of child abuse, the horrors of drug abuse, alcoholism, terrorism, and violence are everywhere. Added to these are the stresses caused by a foundering economy, by taxes, plus the ever threatening specter of nuclear war.

Looking ahead, what do we see? On the international scene, there will be more strifes, more wars and rumors of wars. There will be fear and perplexity, uncertainty and unrest. But was it not all foretold? If all were peace and tranquillity, if all were looking for the good of each other, what would we think of the promise of God? But no, these very conditions were foretold, that "there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress

of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

But with the sure knowledge that God is in control, even these negatives become bright with promise, for they only confirm our faith in the Divine scheme and shout to us in clearest tones that our deliverance—our redemption—is near. For did not Jesus say, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

On the national scene, there will be more of peril and woe, as men are lovers of their own selves. Again, we see the Scriptures fulfilled, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (II Tim. 3:1-4).

And so we look forward to the new year with awe—and with God. For these are not ordinary times. These are not ordinary days. Events are building steadily toward the climax. Men and nations everywhere are unwitting instruments in the hand of God, preparing the stage for the next scene, the arrival of the Great King, the new government, and the fulfilling of all the great and wonderful promises of God.

Some of us may not be around for the completion of this year. Some of us may not have the opportunity of welcoming another new year. But let us thank God for each day as He gives it, knowing that if we truly live to Him, should our life end we will not be forgot-

(Continued on page 26)

Megiddo means ...

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon); "a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (II Cor. 10:4-5).

We believe ...

- in God, the Creator and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."
- in the Bible as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be king of the whole earth.
- in the Holy Spirit, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- in life as the gift of God, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- in humankind as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- in ourselves as capable of applying in our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- in the promise of God, that a new age is coming—is near—when the earth shall be filled with His glory, His people, and God's will be done here as it is now done in heaven.

Soon-coming events ...

THE HERALD AND THE KING

OUR PLANET will soon witness the greatest events in its history. For centuries God has been silent. But that silence will soon be broken by the arrival of Elijah the prophet, who comes to herald the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: ...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then shall follow the King of kings and Lord of lords, to begin His momentous work of transforming our world into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God.

The Bible pictures all events, all men and all nations moving together toward this one God-ordained climax, when "the kingdoms of this world" will become "the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15), a kingdom in which all will enjoy the blessings of peace, equity and prosperity. When the task is complete, our earth shall be numbered among the heavenly, glorified worlds and filled with immortal inhabitants, bringing to reality the promise of our Lord in His prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

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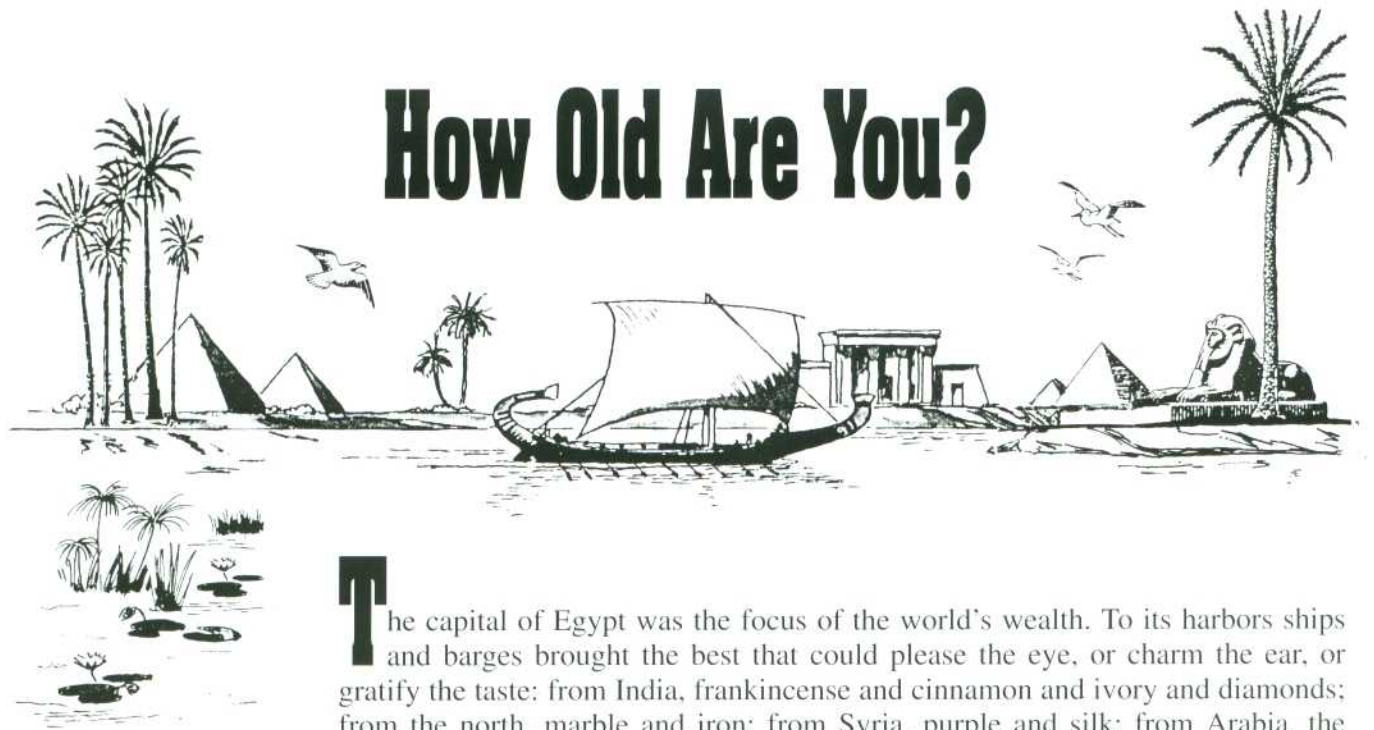
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How Old Are You?



The capital of Egypt was the focus of the world's wealth. To its harbors ships and barges brought the best that could please the eye, or charm the ear, or gratify the taste: from India, frankincense and cinnamon and ivory and diamonds; from the north, marble and iron; from Syria, purple and silk; from Arabia, the finest horses; from Greece, brilliant chariots of iron. No luxury was too costly for Egypt to afford.

Egyptian temples were aflame with red sandstone, their gateways guarded by pillars adorned with winged creatures, their eyes and beaks and pinions glittering with every kind of precious stone. Along avenues lined with sphinx and fans and obelisks, Egyptian princes rode in carriages pulled by snow-white horses, golden bitted and six abreast, dashing at full run.

On broad palace floors the glories of the Pharaohs were spelled out in letters of beryl and flame. There were foot stools cut from a single precious stone; and chairs spotted with the sleek hides of leopards.

It was to this capital and palace that Jacob, the plain shepherd from Israel, came to meet his son Joseph, who was then prime minister. Imagine, if you can, that meeting—of the Pharaoh and Jacob, of celebrity and rustic, the grace of the court and the plain manners of the field. The king, wanting to make the old countryman feel at ease, thinks quickly to come upon some topic of common interest. Observing how white his beard and how feeble his step, he looks kindly into the aged face and asks, "How old are you?"

It is an appropriate question for us to ask. It is an interest we all share in common with Pharaoh and Jacob the Patriarch: How old are you? How old am I? But I am not looking for a literal response to the question, for one's age in years matters little if at all. I want to see by what rod we are measuring our existence.

There is a right way and a wrong way to measure a door, or a wall, or an arch, or a tower. Just so there is a right way and a wrong way to measure our existence. It is with reference to this higher meaning that we contemplate this thought, and the stupendous question, "How old are you?"

There are those whose only measure of life is time. While this is useful for some purposes, it is not for us. The simple passing of time is a matter beyond our control and in itself does not foster virtue. When we stand before the great Judge, He will not be looking at *how long* we lived, but rather *how well*. For this reason we need not concern ourselves with a length of life. A life of thirty years dedicated to God is worth incomparably more than ninety squandered for self: so taught our Master. Neither is the time since our enlightenment a factor of note; only of accountability. From this perspective, our age becomes much more than a question of mere minutes and hours, days and years. It becomes a matter of values, and for this reason the question: What *real worth* have I been putting into my life to increase its *value*? How old am I?

There are those who estimate life's value by worldly satisfactions gained or lost. When Lord Dundas was wished a happy new year one time, he said: "It will *have* to be a happier year than the past, for I haven't had one happy moment in all the twelve months that have gone."

Thank God, such has not been our experience. Whatever our testings and trials, *we have found satisfactions*, happiness, even real joy—because we could look beyond the trial to the glorious "afterward."

However many the dark places, there have also been bright ones, very bright. We have had joys innumerable. If not, let us look carefully to ourselves, to see if we may not be fully appreciating the multitude of God's gifts.

But whether our joys be many or few, they still are not the measure of our life, because we are not mea-

suring life by any temporal standard, of either gain or loss.

Our present time is at best but the first rung on a ladder of spiritual achievement that reaches to the skies; or it is the first step on a road that plunges into a dreadful abyss. So when we ask, "How old are you?" we do not mean to ask, How much happiness have you found? or, what temporal gratifications have you achieved? but rather, Toward what destiny are you traveling, and how fast are you getting there?

There are those who estimate the value of their life by the amount of money they have accumulated. They say, "This year or that year was wasted." Why? Because they made no money.

Now it is insincere to talk against money, as though it had no value. Money can represent the necessities and comforts of life. Money is often our means of doing good. Money is necessary to carry on the work of the Lord. We could not publish the gospel of the soon coming Kingdom if it were not for money.

But let us not think of money as anything but a *means to an end*, or we will discover our mistake when the glittering treasure slips from our grasp and we must leave this world without a cent. Money is not a true measure of life. "They that boast themselves in their wealth and trust in the multitude of their riches, none of them can, by any means, redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him,...that he should... not see corruption" (Ps. 49:7, 9).

What, then, is the answer to our question, "How old are you?" By what rule shall we measure our age?

When we ask this question, we are looking back; but we are looking back for the purpose of *getting*

ahead. We are looking back to see what we have already put behind us, and what needs yet to be put behind us. We are comparing *what we are* with what God says *we must become*. We must see both, and honestly, if we would attain the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

One good measure of our age is our moral and spiritual development. This is a measurement we

What real worth
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need to take, and take frequently. Have we the stature, the maturity, the perception, the grasp of spiritual concerns that we should have considering the time and the advantages God has granted us?

If our answer is no, if we do not feel that we are "old enough" for the opportunities we have had, this is no time to be discouraged. This is the time to look ahead, to make straight paths for our feet and *walk in them*. This is the time to look squarely at ourselves and say, I am not what I ought to be, but God helping me I shall change the picture. I shall use the coming days to their maximum. For *in all, through all, and above all* I want God's approval upon my life.

Spiritual deficiencies are not to be glossed over, or belittled. The apostle Paul saw them as matters

How Old Are You?

for serious concern. He taught clearly that one's age in Christ is a measure of one's spiritual achievement. Hear the reprimand which he directed to some who thought themselves of ripe spiritual age when they were not: "You who are, so to speak, proud of your God. You know his plan, and are able through your knowledge of the Law truly to appreciate moral values. You confidently look upon yourself as a guide to those who do not know the way, and as a light to those who are groping in the dark.

I am not what I ought to be, but God helping me I shall change the picture. For in all, through all, and above all I want God's approval.

You can instruct those who have no spiritual wisdom: you can teach those who, spiritually speaking, are only just out of the cradle. You have a certain grasp of the basis of true knowledge. You have without doubt very great advantages. But, prepared as you are to instruct others, do you ever teach yourself anything? You preach against stealing, for example, but are you sure of your own honesty? You denounce the practice of adultery, but are you sure of your own purity?...Everyone knows how proud you are of the Law, but that means a proportionate dishonor to God when men know that you break it!" (Rom. 2:17-24, Phillips). They were not

what they should have been—or could have been—and Paul wanted them to face the fact, and change.

If, on the other hand, we can look at our record and see progress, let us thank God and say, In the coming year, I shall do even better.

It is not egotism to be encouraged. It is not egotism to look honestly at ourselves and say, I am more pure than I used to be. I am more consecrated to Christ than I used to be. I have got over some of the bad habits I used to indulge in. My hope of the Kingdom is brighter than it was a year ago, I have become a better person.

God forbid that we ever belittle our progress, neither do we want to see it out of proportion. But the fact that we have made some headway is proof that we can make *more*. What we have done gives us greater impetus to do more. However much we have grown, we have yet to bring ourselves to the full stature of Christ.

There is yet another yardstick by which we may measure our life, and that is *by the strength of our convictions*. Thank God! He has not left us to walk in darkness. Though we must live and walk by faith, we *know* whereof we speak. We have evidence, strong, sustaining evidence, and we must go over and over and over it, again and again. For as we fix our minds on God, as we read of those who have gone before, we can dwell in thought with them and share in the rich experiences that were theirs. By faith, by contemplating the mighty mountains of evidence written for our learning and testified to by the stalwarts of God who have gone before us, we too can see that which is at the moment invisible.

Thank God for the rich experiences we have shared through reading of those who have gone before

us. We have stood, as it were, on Mount Sinai, and heard the thunder. We have climbed Mount Pisgah with Moses, and viewed the Land of Promise. We have stood with John, as it were, on lonely Patmos, and looked up to see heaven open and the glorious City, the new Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. We have sat with Paul in the prison cell, as it were, and shared his rapture—living messages of hope, glimpses into future glory. We do not have to wonder—we know! It is all true. If we are stronger in this assurance, if we can look up with greater confidence than ever before, let us thank God!

For as surely as God was working with His people in other ages, just so surely is He working with His people today. The God that lived in Moses' day, or Noah's, or Daniel's, or Joseph's, or Jesus', or Paul's, or Peter's—is *just the same today*.

Such is the true measure of our life. Look at those who invested their whole life for God, who concentrated all their mental and moral acumen in pleasing Him. No price was too high for them to pay. They climbed mountains, crossed seas, trudged deserts, their eye fixed on the goal. We measure their lives not by the years they lived but by the victories they won, victories over selfishness and sin, victories over pettiness and pride, victories in behalf of others who might also share their triumph. They felt in the thrill of every nerve, in the motion of every muscle, in the throb of every heartbeat this magnificent resolve of the apostle Paul: "I live for God."

How old are they? You cannot calculate the worth of their lives by any human arithmetic. God only knows its measure. But you can

estimate it. And even when the first interval of their life is complete, you know that is not all; This is but the introduction to life. Add ten thousand times ten thousand years, and you have still not expressed the extent of their lives—what they *will* live.

Oh, what a standard to measure life by!

There are those who think they have lived thirty, or forty, or sixty, or eighty years. They may not have lived ten. They may not even have entered upon their infancy, for one must become a babe in Christ to begin at all. But from that point of beginning, what growth is possible! The measure of their life is a measure of the spiritual victories they go on to win, the evils they leave behind, and the good they learn to practice. Yes, their lives may measure a thousand, or a thousand thousand. And still that is not all!

God is not looking at our advantages, or disadvantages. It does not matter to Him what our tact or talent, or the year of our birth. Only this matters: that we hear and do, that we practice to the full the knowledge that has been committed to us, that we live to the highest of our high calling, that we use all we have and are in the service of our King.

While we are measuring our age, we should look even more to the measure yet to be filled, for we have not arrived; we are only on the

way. We need to ponder how much more we can pack into our time, of kindness, sincerity, love, patience, godliness; how much more holiness, future-mindedness, and deep earnest conviction; how much more keen sensitivity to good and out-and-out hatred of evil. For someday our growing days will be over, and we shall have to remain as we are. And if that time finds us immature, we will be rejected. No half-grown child will be accepted, only those of full age.

"How old are you?" This is a good time to begin our new style of measuring. Once more the wheel of time has hurled us onward. The old has gone, the new is here. For what you and I have been launched upon it, only God knows.

But what will we do about it? We need to change our allusion of measuring ourselves by time, and see only the true worth God sees. It matters not at all whether we have been working in His service for ten years, or fifty. What matters is *what we have accomplished, what we have done in bringing ourselves mentally and morally to the likeness of Christ.*

Let us this very day begin a new and strenuous effort to outdistance ourselves, and we may easily show that we can do more in a month than we formerly did in a year or two. It is all a matter of conviction, concentration, and dead earnest effort. It is all a matter of keeping a

firm hand on ourselves, and telling ourselves clearly what we shall and shall not allow.

Day by day our life is going by. Is our age in Christ keeping pace with our years? Nay rather, let it outrun our years. Into each fleeting day let us pack more and more of genuine worth, seize every opportunity to put down the old and build up the new.

For every passing year is bringing us nearer, nearer, nearer home. Let our countenance light up with the thought! We are coming nearer home!

Some day soon we shall hear the trumpet sound. The dead in Christ shall rise, and out of the azure blue will burst our King, with all His shining retinue of a myriad angels. How the music will swell, as the harmonies of earth blend with the symphonies of heaven in one grand triumphal march. It will be a time to celebrate the triumph of the victors, as they who receive the reward of immortality ascend step by step to the throne from whence they shall shine for ever as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Praise God! We are coming nearer home.

And "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 ever. Amen."

MM

We need to ponder how much more we can pack into our time, of kindness, sincerity, love, patience, godliness; how much more holiness, future-mindedness, and deep earnest conviction.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

*Glory to God in the
highest, and on earth
peace, good will
toward men"*

The Great Announcement



The ways of God are strange. Notice how they work out His purpose.

The time has come for the greatest event in the history of the earth. Nothing like it has happened on this planet since its creation. The long-promised Son of God, the future King of all the earth, is entering life. Heaven bends closer to earth to acclaim the sublime event which generations of inspired men of God have seen. Surely so momentous a happening merits a regal annunciation to the world which it is to bless.

The angelic host is mustered; rehearsed, perhaps (if immortal beings need rehearsing!). The sublime theme of the message is set to music, the language of happiness. Who is to be the audience of this angel choir? Where will the announcement be made? An event of universal significance would seem to call for universal publicity.

Below lies the ancient world—very modern to its proud inhabitants—with its populous cities, its commerce and industry, its schools and temples of religion—all the outward signs of a high degree of culture and civilization. Here slumbers Rome, the all-powerful mistress of the world, with its million inhabitants. Amid this vast multitude there must be a goodly number of honest and intelligent folk who are looking for a Deliverer. A fitting center, perhaps, for the proclamation of the message, a center from which the message

might swiftly radiate to the limits of the Empire. Perhaps. But no, the message is not for Rome.

There lies Athens, decayed but impressive in its decay; still a seat of high culture and learning. Might not the sages of Greece, weary of unprofitable speculations, turn with relief to the promise of a new kingdom and a newborn Messiah?

Or perhaps the message might find a welcome in Corinth, with its roaring markets of trade and finance, its eager bustle and drive. But for both, the answer is no.

Southward sprawls Alexandria, where east meets west and a new culture is in the making. Among its hundreds of thousands of souls, wouldn't the King surely find friends? Evidently not, for the message is not given to them. Westward are the brilliant provincial centers of Spain and Gaul, Mauretania and Tunisia. Northeast and north is the heartland of the Empire—Asia Minor, studded with teeming centers of population and government and trade: Ephesus, Sardis, Antioch in Pisidia, Antioch in Syria, city after city. And far beyond lie the distinct but already ancient civilizations of Persia, of India, and Cathay. Everywhere is humanity—stumbling, groping, forlorn. With the field so broad, surely the message would be heralded far and near.

Ah! the heavenly concourse sweeps downward toward Jerusalem. We might have guessed it!

Jerusalem, the Holy City, corrupt, apostate, unregenerate, yet now as for centuries past the center of all worshipers of the one God. Palestine may be a tiny country, but it has never been insignificant. Our message this night may sweep Jerusalem to a reformation greater than that of the days of King Josiah. Surely this is the place!

Then—the course is changed. A few miles from the walls of the metropolis sleeps the little town of Bethlehem. Yes, Bethlehem. This is where the King is born. This is the town of which the prophet Micah wrote, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2) No doubt about it. Before proceeding to the great cities this favored spot must be informed of the glory and honor which rests upon it. A pleasant thought—but stay! Even this town is avoided. Where now?

Around a flickering fire on a lonely hillside, eight or ten men in the rough garb of shepherds are keeping watch over their flocks. Some talk in low tones, some sleep, wrapped in their cloaks. Above them the leader of the angelic hosts halts and reveals his glory to their wondering eyes while he delivers his sublime message:

"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

At his signal, the heavenly multitude burst into song: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

Then the glory fades, and the immortal host goes—not to Bethlehem, not to Jerusalem, nor Antioch, nor Alexandria, nor Rome, but back into heaven—home. Is

this all? Yes, this is all. Their work is done, begun and ended above that lonely hillside outside a forgotten village in an obscure and turbulent province. Never did king or emperor witness a command performance to measure with that beheld by this handful of unlettered peasants that night—a performance planned in heaven and executed for them—and for us.

Why? We do not know. We cannot even guess. The ways of God are strange.

Or perhaps, it is our ways that are strange. Perhaps there is some type or shadow in it which we have not found. At any rate, it has left us one of our brightest gems of hope and promise.

The words of the angel-song are more than an idealistic longing or an expression of man's high yearning through the ages. In the light of inspiration they are pure prophecy, for peace on earth *will* come. Good will among men *will* come. And the Messiah who was born that night shall be the means of their coming. He alone can wield the physical might necessary to sweep away the evils of the ages and usher in the new age of ages when Isaiah's vision shall become a reality:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,...and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their

***Peace on earth
will come. Good
will among men
will come.***

swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:2-4).

The modern language renderings of our text give a slightly different idea to the closing phrase: "Peace among men of good will." "Peace among men in whom he is pleased," "to men whom he favors." Those of good will, those with whom God is pleased, shall have even in this life the great peace which nothing can offend (Ps. 119:165), and in the world to come the result of righteousness shall be peace, quietness and assurance forever (Isa. 32:17-18).

This was the message of the angels that night long ago. Soon it will be glorious reality! MM

***Here is a truth we
need to record at the
very depth of our
being: that all our
efforts for God count.***

Forsaken or FREE?

In the 27th chapter of the gospel of Matthew we find Jesus' last recorded words spoken shortly before He died. The translation of these words, as rendered in our Common Version and most of the newer versions is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (v. 46).

Were we to read these words without any previous knowledge of Bible teaching, we would be horrified. Could a loving, gracious, protecting Father forsake His Son at such a time? Could He possibly forsake one whose life of consecration had been flawless, whose obedience had been perfect, whose submission had been so exemplary and complete?

Theologians generally agree that God did forsake Jesus at this moment. We quote from an author in a current magazine: "There was feeling in Jesus' cry, a longing and more intense, unprecedented feeling than life could ever show us. Behind the dark feelings stood an awesome and distressing fact: Jesus was forsaken!...He went into His death as a God-forsaken man. This puzzles us, yes; but it is nevertheless fact."

Why? we ask. Why would God forsake Jesus at so critical a moment? Again theologians have

an answer. How could He do otherwise, when, and we quote again, "all the scum and filth of human life had settled upon his soul"! "He was bearing our iniquities, all of them; they burdened Him down and blocked His way to God. The dereliction expressed in this outcry of Jesus was a real awareness on his part of the experience of lostness. As a voluntary victim, as our substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus' death consisted in suffering the penalty of our sins; He received, in our place, sin's wages. God forsook him.... His dereliction was real—because our sins were upon him." Other theologians go so far as to say that Jesus at that moment relinquished His "divinity" so as to be able to identify with our lowly humanity, so that the atonement could be effective. And He had to be left unsupported at such a moment, or the redeeming power of His death

would have been ruined. In fact, some add that the "keen edge" of His passion was necessary to "make His sufferings meritorious to us." If Jesus' agony had not been so great, and if God had not forsaken Him at that moment, we might be still under the condemnation of death for our sins!

Is not such teaching an outrage against a righteous, loving and holy God? How terrible the very idea of it! And how utterly foreign to the teaching of the Bible. The Bible does not even tell us that Jesus' death was necessary to deliver us from the punishment our sins deserve, much less to say that the more He suffered, the more meritorious that death would be! Such horrors surely do not belong to the high ideals of Christianity.

But even if we remove the ideas that theology has attached, we still have the words of Jesus as they appear in Matthew 27:46: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What are we to believe? Did God forsake His Son at that moment?

Among the most cherished promises of Scripture are those of God's constant care and protection for His own. He is gracious, merciful, kind, a "very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). "The Lord is

***If God forsook Jesus
on the cross, how
can any of us be sure
of His protection
and love?***

good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nah. 1:7). Surely Jesus was as deserving of God's "very present help" as any who ever lived, and He qualified fully among those "that trust in him," for His confidence was complete.

The Psalmist spoke of God as his rock, his deliverer, his shield, his high tower, "and he in whom I trust" (Ps. 144:2). He cried to the Lord in his troubles, and that the Lord heard, he was confident (Ps. 66:19). Surely Christ would have been as deserving as the Psalmist. The Psalmist testified further: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up....I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:10, 13). Again he declared, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken....And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hath not forsaken them that seek thee" (37:25; 9:10). Could this be David's experience—and yet Jesus be forsaken?

It was God's promise to Joshua: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5). It was Moses' confidence for the people of Israel: "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" (Deut. 4:7). It was a confidence which the prophet Samuel expressed to his people: "Turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart:...for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake" (I Sam. 12:20, 22). The prophet Jeremiah (51:5) uttered the same thought: "For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts." If Israel was deserving of such care, why not Christ?

Isaiah extended the promise in these words:

"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none,...I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them....I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (41:17; 42:16).

The author of Hebrews repeats the sublime promise: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). Was this promise to "us" and not to Christ?

We are told still further that God forsakes only those who forsake Him. As the prophet Zechariah proclaimed to his people, "Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you" (II Chron. 24:20).

The Psalmist cried, "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion....Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. For mine enemies speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him, for there is none to deliver him" (Ps. 71:1, 9-11). His enemies claimed that God had forsaken him, but David avowed that such was not the case.

Where is the consistency in God's love, if He shows greater care and concern for others of His human children than for His own beloved Son? How could God

promise His people, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and then forsake Jesus in His last moments of mortal life? Is this consistent with His promises that never fail? Is this what Jesus was to expect from His Father?

Not according to Jesus. His message to His disciples spoken the evening of the Passover Supper ring with confidence and trust (see

Among the most cherished promises of Scripture are those of God's constant care and protection for His own.

John, chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16). "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you....Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me....I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also....Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I....If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love....Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone." Jesus knew that they, the disciples, would forsake Him. But did He expect the

Forsaken or FREE?

Father to forsake Him also? He did not. "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace" (John 16:32-33). Must we conclude that when the hour of trial arrived, God disappointed Jesus and did forsake Him? It is unthinkable.

This same confidence had been Jesus' all through His ministry. "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). And in His last prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee....I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do....O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me" (17:1, 4, 25). Jesus knew His Father and all His attributes, and knew that He was not left alone. Even knowing what lay ahead, He could say, "O righteous Father,...thou lovedst me." How could He say it if His Father would forsake Him? And after He had prayed in the garden,

and had uttered those immortal words of resignation, "Not my will, but thine, be done," we read that "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:42-43). His Father had not forsaken Him at this time.

If Jesus had been forsaken at the last moment, would not many a sufferer who followed in His footsteps have quailed at the prospect of martyrdom? What of men like Stephen, Paul, Peter, and many others who had to suffer—how could they have been sure God would be with them if He had forsaken Jesus in His suffering?

The reading of Psalm 22:1 is commonly used as proof for the doleful complaint with which Jesus is thought to have ended His last hour on the cross. However, a careful examination of the words used gives other possible meanings.

Several Bible commentators express difficulty in translating the words used in Psalm 22:1 and in Matthew 27:46 with any degree of accuracy; several others decline to comment. Adam Clarke suggests that the words may be "referred [more] to the wicked Jews than to our Lord, and are an exclamation indicative of the obstinate wicked-

ness of His crucifiers; who steeled their hearts against every operation of the power of God."

Thus it might be translated: "My God! My God! to what sort of persons hast Thou left Me?" He then gives another possibility: "Through the whole of the Sacred Writings, God is represented as doing those things which, in the course of His providence, He only permits to be done. Therefore the words, 'To whom hast Thou left or given Me up?' are only a form of expression for 'How astonishing is the wickedness of those persons into whose hands I am fallen!'"

The Lamsa Bible translates this text giving another thought: "My God, my God, for this I was spared"—which also removes totally the thought of God forsaking Jesus. And in a footnote, it suggests also: "This was my destiny."

In a book by J. Ralston Skinner, in which the author seems intent only on explaining certain peculiarities of the Hebrew language, particular attention is given to what he calls "the false rendering of the words of the Saviour as given in Matthew, chap. 27, v. 46." The author first quotes the Hebrew words, and then comments: "The Scripture of these words says...

I have been bothered over that testimony where our Lord said when on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But I have now solved the question, and I cannot see why the translators rendered it as they did in our Bible. I don't see how people could think of giving so much honor to Christ if He said it, after the wonderful power God gave Him, and the many times He had been delivered, and then to say, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

I had to dig through a pile of rubbish to get the solution, but I knew it was there if I dug deep

Deliverance!

enough. I read it over and over, "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani."

There was one word in a little corner that had no definition, and I had missed seeing it every time, and right under it said, "See mar for definition." Well, I went back to look at mar and oh! What a flood of light poured in! It is used as an exclamation of admiration, "How wonderful is my deliverance!" "O God, the great God, how great is thy deliverance unto me!" The other definition is—"To release from bondage or burden"; and so it would read, "O God, the great God, how great is my deliverance from this burden!" — L. T. Nichols

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'...Now the words will not bear this interpretation, and it is a false rendering. The true meaning is just the opposite of the one given, and is: My God, my God, how thou dost glorify me! But even more, for while *lama* is why, or how, as a verbal it connects the idea of *to dazzle*, or... 'how dazzlingly.'" He further states that Ps. 22:1 also is falsely rendered.

From the Hebrew Lexicon (Gesenius') we find the word translated "forsaken" in Psalm 22:1 has for its first definition: "To loosen bands and to let a beast go free from its bonds...Thus in the difficult passage, Ex. 23:5, 'If thou see the ass of thy enemy lying down under its burden, beware that thou leave him not, but that thou loose his bonds.'" The lexicographer further explains: "There is a play of the words in the double use of the verb which stands first in common signification of forsaking, than in the primary one of loosing. It is applied to a servant set free." This being true, why could we not replace the word "forsaken" in Psalm 22:1 and in Jesus' quotation of that passage, with the words "set free"?

If we select the meaning that harmonizes the words of Jesus with the thoughts of God expressed elsewhere in the Word, are we not being fair to the Scriptures? We know that the Word of God teaches that He never forsakes the righteous; hence do we not do injustice to the Word when we choose a meaning that suggests that God forsook Jesus? How much better the thought that He was "set free." Historians inform us that it was customary for men who were crucified to linger several days before death ended their sufferings. Pilate, we are told, marveled when informers told him that Jesus was so soon dead. He could not believe it and so

sent a trusty centurion to confirm the report. But it was the mercy of God. Jesus was delivered from prolonged suffering, and was it not fitting for Him, as He felt the end approaching, to utter an exclamation of praise for relief?

Thus we might phrase Jesus' last words, "My God! my God! how greatly thou hast helped me! how wonderful has been my release!" Instead of thinking God had forsaken Him, Jesus breathes His last with words of thankfulness to His righteous Father who had relieved Him of suffering and would so soon raise Him from death's slumber to the glory of an endless life.

Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon gives another definition of the original word translated "forsake" in our Common Version: "to commit to anyone, to leave in one's care, as in Psalm 10:14, 'the poor committeth himself unto thee.'" Isn't this exactly what Jesus was doing at this time, committing Himself to the care of His heavenly Father? Far from being forsaken, He was in this helpless moment trusting Himself to the keeping of God.

Did God forsake Jesus? Never! And neither will He forsake any other faithful servant.

His promise is sure.

MM

The Lord Is King

*The Lord is King! lift up thy voice,
O earth, and all ye heav'ns rejoice!
From world to world the joy shall ring,
"The Lord Omnipotent is King!"*

*The Lord is King! who then shall dare
Resist His will, distrust His care,
Or murmur at His wise decrees,
Or doubt His royal promises?*

*The Lord is King! child of the dust,
The Judge of all the earth is just;
Holy and true are all His ways;
Let ev'ry creature speak His praise.*

*Oh, when His wisdom can mistake,
His might decay, His love forsake,
Then may His children cease to sing,
"The Lord Omnipotent is King!"*

Loving His Appearing

Every true believer shares the lively expectation of the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. *He is coming!* The Word of God is explicit beyond dispute. Before He went away, our Lord promised to come again, and the promise of His coming is made over and over again in the New Testament.

The apostle Paul went one step further than simple expectation. He said that all true believers will “love his appearing” (II Tim. 4:8). The expression is almost at the end of his last communication to his son-in-the-faith Timothy. He has been writing about his imminent martyrdom, and he says that there awaits him “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Loving His appearing, then, is an attitude which will be the desire and determination of all true believers.

Why?

First, we should love His appearing *for our own sake*. This is the most obvious of all reasons because Christ is coming to bring us our reward. “Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him” (Isa. 40:10). At His hand we shall receive for what we have done, whether good or bad. And if our work has been well done, what a wonderful day that will be!

His coming means the time when we shall be released from the constant watching, the incessant battle with our lower nature and the sins of the flesh which have plagued us. His coming will mean the end of all suffering, pain, disappointment and distress which we experience here.

Second, we should love His appearing *for the world's sake*. Our world today needs help. No sane person can deny this. These are days of uncertainty and fear, of peril and suffering. People are afraid as never before. People are oppressed. People are mistreated. People are victims of their own ignorance and self-will. People are victims of crime and injustice.

But the coming of Christ will correct all this. When He sits upon the throne of His glory, men will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Mic. 4:3-4). All this being true, how ardently we should love His appearing!

Third, we should love His appearing *for His sake*. This may seem strange, but our Lord has not yet reached the apex of His career. The long years of preparation, His mortal career on earth, His years at the Father's right hand, all are a training for the work He has yet to do as King of the earth. Today He sits at the right hand of God, “expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13). But when He comes, He will enter into His glory as earth's rightful Lord and King. He shall “sit upon the throne of his glory” (Matt. 25:31), and will have dominion “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth...All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him” (Ps. 72:8-11). Does He not deserve the honor He will receive? Truly, we should love His appearing for the fullest joy of victory and triumph it will bring to Him.

In Revelation we are told of the joy and rejoicing that will accompany the marriage of the Lamb, “For the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). Every prospective member of that Bride has reason to rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is coming. And will *He* not rejoice also when the marriage takes place? Is He not even now eager for it? Truly we should love His appearing *for His sake*.

What does it mean to love His appearing? Surely it does not mean a mere intellectual belief in the fact of His return. There are many today who believe that Christ is coming, but whose lives show little evidence of the fact.

We know that He will come, but do our hearts long for Him? Do we truly *love* His appearing, not merely expect it?

It is significant that Paul uses the phrase “love his appearing” in connection with the “crown of righteousness” Christ will bring. This crown of righteousness was Paul's real and vibrant expectation. And he was confident that it would be his, because he had “fought a good fight,” he had “finished his course,” he had “kept the faith.” All of this indicates that loving His appearing means more than merely wanting Him to come. We, too, must fight the good fight. We, too, must finish our course. We, too, must be found keeping the faith.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

—II Timothy 4:8

*Hark! the Great Creator, robed in majesty,
Calleth into being Earth, its land and sea;
Hark! in countless numbers all the angel throng
Hail the earth's creation with a burst of song.*

*Bright the world and glorious, calm both earth and sea,
Noble in its grandeur, silent in its peace;
Then He made earth's mortals, giving life to all,
Offering them salvation, who would heed His call.*

To
love
His ap-
pearing is,
as Paul wrote
to Timothy, to
"devote your atten-
tion to the public read-
ing of the scriptures, to
exhortation, and to teach-
ing" (I Tim. 4:13, NEB).

*Long the nations waited, through the troubled night,
Looking, longing, yearning for the promised Light.
Prophets saw the morning breaking far away,
Minstrels sang the splendor of that opening Day.*

*Brightly dawned the Advent of the new-born King,
Joyously the watchers heard the angels sing.
Briefly, for a moment, closed this hallowed life,
Then it burst in triumph— ended was the strife.*

*Lo! again He cometh, robed in clouds of light,
He the Judge eternal, armed with power and might.
Nations to His footstool gathered then shall be;
Earth shall yield her treasures, and her dead, the sea.*

*Jesus! Lord and Master, Prophet, Priest, and King,
To Thy feet, triumphant, hallowed praise we bring.
Thine shall be the Kingdom, Thine the victory;
Power, praise, and honor be, O Lord, to Thee!*

Christ is coming, and His glory will shine in matchless beauty over all the earth. Upon that coming we have set our hope, wholly and completely. What will it do for us? "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3). To love His appearing, then, is to be pure, separate, apart. It is to live unstained by any taint of sin.

If we are constantly reminding ourselves that this day may be the day, that today our Lord may come, we will hold ourselves in readiness for His coming. We will not be dabbling in the things that would displease Him. We will remember more and more that we are His property, and must "set [our] affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Then, too, that hope will energize us! We will have zeal and ardor, we will be awake and alive to His interests. Christ is preparing His church, His body, "one new man," who will rule the world in righteousness. When that new man is complete, He will come. And if we love His appearing, we will do all that we can, as long as we can, in whatever way that we can to hasten that completion.

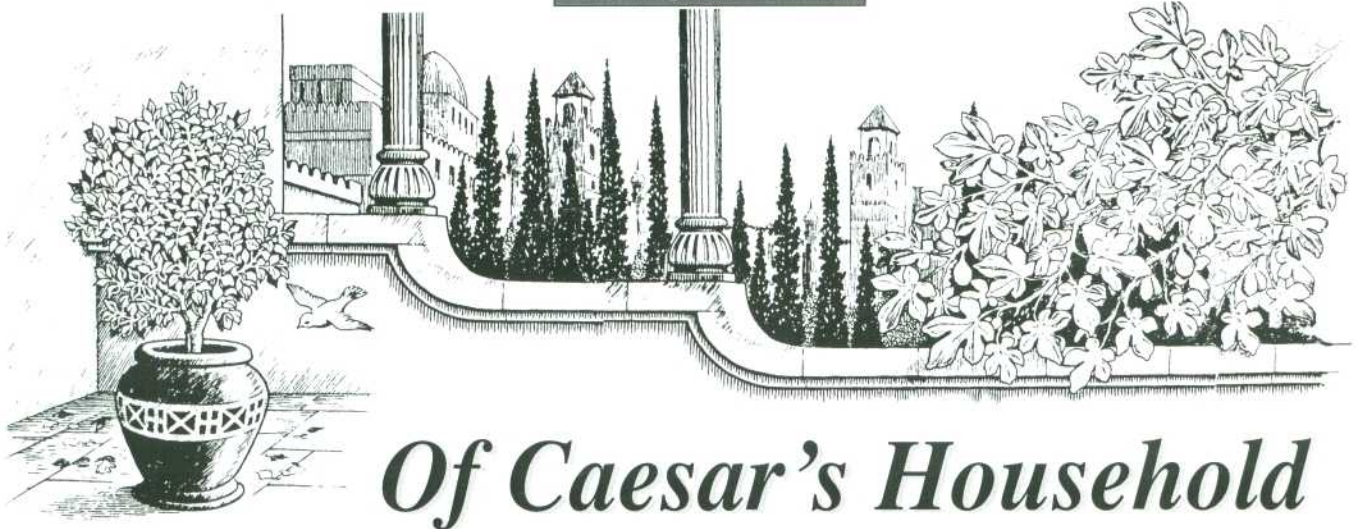
Some years ago a man who had been through World

War II was talking to some people about the war. He told how he rejoiced on coming home. He was sailing up the river toward New York, and there on the shore was a huge electric sign which read "Welcome home! Well done!" In that great day of our Lord's appearing, can we even faintly imagine the joy that will fill our hearts as Christ says to every victorious believer, "Welcome home! Well done!"

But will He be able to say "Well done" to us? The answer depends upon us,

and
what
we are
doing this
very day.
For we shall
hear those words
only if we have
been separated unto
Him, faithful in His
service, loving His
appearing.

MM



Of Caesar's Household

Looking Ahead—by Faith

The Gathered Ecclesia

Across the Tiber, in the house of Aquila, all was bustle and excitement. This was the largest of the several congregations of Roman Christians, and this a very special meeting. A visiting preacher was to speak—no less a personage than Luke the physician, the companion of Paul. Aquila, the aged but still active leader, sat on a raised dais at the end of the room. Beside him was his wife Priscilla, the snows of winter liberally sprinkled on her hair but a wealth of understanding, sympathy, and spirituality glowed in her face. Before them were gathered the flock—Jews, Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans; slaves, freedmen, and free citizens; men, women, and children. Several of the palace slaves were present, as the duties of most of them ended at sunset and the discipline after hours was not rigid. Irene, however, was not in the congregation; the experiences of the previous day and apprehension of the future had made her ill.

In the center of the eager, interested group, was the tall, spare form of the distinguished visitor, receiving introductions, shaking hands with every one within reach—affable, genial, but with the dignity of a professional man and a leader. A Roman citizen himself and a man of high culture, he could have moved in what the world would call a higher social circle, but he had chosen the better part, to minister to the spiritual needs of a humble but sincere and honest people, that he might obtain certain and enduring riches and honor.

Eutropius, a Greek brother, was managing the introductions. Several of the brethren were old acquaintances, Luke having been in Rome with Paul at the time of the Apostle's enforced sojourn. Others were more recent converts. Eutropius caught sight of a shock of yellow hair, well above the heads of the rest of the group.

"Arthur!" he called.

The owner of the thatch, a tall, wiry youth, well thewed and sinewed, approached.

"I want you to meet Doctor Luke, our preacher tonight. Just think, Arthur, he was a personal friend of

Paul—traveled with him for months! More than that, he has seen Jesus in the flesh."

Arthur grasped the proffered hand and shook it warmly.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "What a privilege! Your words will be the true bread of heaven—and we are hungry tonight."

"By the way," queried the doctor after a searching, scrutinizing glance, "you are from Britain, are you not?"

Arthur's face beamed.

"Indeed I am! Have you been there? No? That's too bad. It's the only place worth living, if only the people were Christians. You know, these Romans think they know it all, but they could learn a lot from the British. Not the brethren, you understand, but the heathen."

"And how, may I ask, did you happen to come to Rome?"

Eutropius answered the question.

"Just as most Britons come here. Unfortunately, Arthur is not his own master. He has the distinction of having the worst position of anyone in the Church at Rome."

"And what might that be?"

"He is a slave in the temple of Apollo."

Luke shot the Briton a questioning, almost reproving look.

"And what do you do in such a place, brother? Surely you do not join in their abominable idol-worship?"

"Not exactly," replied Arthur, with a broad grin. "The fact is, I'm nothing more nor less than a butcher. I'm the fellow who hits the bullock in the head with a hammer when he is led up for sacrifice. When I was captured in a little fracas with the Eighteenth Legion and brought to Rome, the old haruspex (soothsayer) needed a good strong man for this job, so he brought me up, and I've been at it ever since. Monotonous job, but someone has to do it, and it might be worse. It's nothing to me"—he shrugged his shoulders—"nothing more than doing the same thing in a slaughterhouse. But, really, they don't even know how to butcher their cattle properly here. Now, over home—"

"Yes, yes," Eutropius interrupted, "we know all about that part of it—that 'over home' is the only place where things are done right. Herman there says the same thing about Germany. But never mind that now."

Arthur was covered with confusion.

"Thank you, Eutropius, for reproving me. I'm trying to break myself of that habit, but it seems it still crops out. Well, as I look at it, I'm in much the same position as Naaman the Syrian, who had to go into the house of Rimmon with his Master as a part of his regular work, only I don't have to bow myself down as he did. As it is, I try to conceal what little intelligence I have, pretend I don't understand Latin, and act as stupid as I can, so my master won't be tempted to promote me to a more prominent place in the service. But, say! that old haruspex certainly has a graft—gets about six times what he paid for the sacrifice

bullocks, then looks into their insides for about half a minute after they are killed, looks wise, and collects a nice fat fee from the poor superstitious fool who wants his fortune told, just for mumbling a few words of so-called prophecy. Then, to finish off the deal, he sells the carcass for beef! I ask you, is there money to be made in religion—that kind of religion?"

"Just like all false teachers," Luke commented. "They invariably 'teach for hire and divine for money.' But we can truthfully say that none of God's true leaders ever preached for salary, although we have a constant fight to keep that spirit from creeping into the Church. But what would your owner do if you became refractory and refused to enter the temple?"

"I know well enough what he would do! He would sell me to the *lanista* (gladiators' training camp), and they would try to make a gladiator of me, and I should probably be crucified in the arena or fed to the lions for refusal. I have several times seen one of the trainers looking me over and talking to the old man, and I know what he wants. My size is a curse to me; I wish I were a little fellow like Eutropius here."

Luke laid his hand comfortingly on the young man's shoulder. "Well, brother, remember the advice of Paul, 'Art thou called being a servant? care not for it...He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman.'"

"I know," replied the Briton, dropping his mask of light-heartedness and speaking very soberly. "I have experienced that freedom which comes by knowledge of the truth and obedience to it, and I would not exchange it for Caesar's throne. But it is hard for one reared in freedom to be unable to call his body his own, to have not a moment of ease except through the compas-

sion of a heathen master, to whom he is no more than one of his dogs; and, above all, the constant threat of a worse fate—the *lanista*—these are not pleasant things. Although—" he was almost shamefaced as he reflected—"I should not complain. *Men* do not weep and wail when it avails nothing. I know that in that future Day all will be made right, all men will be free."

"No," was the physician's reply, "not free, not if we define 'freedom' as the absence of or escape from all responsibility and authority. Our service will be raised to a higher plane and we shall be rid of the domination and contamination of

"Art thou called being a servant? care not for it...He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman."

the unbeliever, but no mortal or immortal can ever be free. Suppose a being totally divested of all necessity for effort, all responsibility to his fellows or himself, all participation in the great scheme of things of which government and discipline are the essential conditions, and you suppose one whose own feelings would be an intolerable burden, whose own wishes would be an unendurable torture. Man is made to bear a yoke, and the yoke of sin is a heavy and galling one; but the Captain whom we serve has told us that 'his yoke is easy and his burden light.' Just how easy and how light, I experience every moment of my life."

Of Caesar's Household

Arthur gazed thoughtfully at the floor for a moment, then met the speaker's earnest gaze.

"You are right," he said. "I shall try to be more content. I know the yoke of the Lord Jesus is a blessed one, but to the natural mind the bitter bread of captivity is bitter still."

"Arthur," Luke counseled, "let not your mind dwell on the dark side

I have experienced that freedom which comes by knowledge of the truth and obedience to it, and I would not exchange it for Caesar's throne." —Arthur

of the picture. As you said, it might be worse; give thanks that Nero is no more. Be obedient to your master—better times may come, even in this life, for this world is full of changes. If he requires you to disobey the Royal Law which binds the household of faith, obey by suffering the penalty, which is no more than many have done before us; and are we better than they? Always keep in mind the dignity of your service in the army of the Lord. Remember the words of Paul: 'All things work together for good to them who love God'; and again, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' If Paul could call his afflictions light, what shall we say of ours? Remember the glory ahead; remember the Kingdom

which we may share if we now fight in the ranks of the Master as good soldiers. You were a warrior in Britain, were you not?"

Arthur nodded, his eye kindling.

"And yet," Luke went on, "this warfare in which you now find yourself is far greater, far nobler, than your little skirmishes with the legions. It is a war in which there is no discharge until the end of life; although when we once get the enemy on the run, it is much easier. You know from your own experience that victory is far more stimulating and enjoyable than defeat. Ours is an army whose warfare is harder, whose watches are longer, whose adversaries are more numerous, but whose triumph is more certain and glorious at the last. And, I tell you, there are braver men—and women—in the ranks of the Lord Jesus today than ever drew sword for Rome or Britain."

He spoke the truth, for the congregation which now filled the house were—the faithful portion at least—like God's soldiers in every age, heroes all. For, in addition to the ever hovering shadow and too often the actual substance of persecution and the menace of the smoldering hatred of the heathen masses, the early Christians had other difficulties, those common to the household of faith in all ages, and perhaps accentuated in that day when the name of the true and living God was not respected as it is even in these bad times. We read of their privations, their persecutions, their imprisonments and their martyrdoms, with a thrill of mingled horror and indignation—we pity and admire, we even glorify them as the leaders of that forlorn hope which was destined to head the armies of the only true Conqueror. But we never consider the daily and harassing warfare in which they must have been engaged, the domestic dissen-

sions, the insults of equals, the alienation of friends—above all, the cold looks and estranged affections of those whom they loved best on earth, whom they must give up here, and whom, with the new light that had broken in upon them, they could scarce hope to see hereafter. So-called heroic deeds are not always deserving of that superiority which they claim over mortal weakness, when emblazoned on the glowing page of history. Many a man is capable, so to speak, of winding himself up for one great effort, even though it be to perish on the scaffold or the breach; but day after day and year after year to wage unceasing war against our nearest and dearest, our own comforts, our own prosperity, nay, our own weaknesses and inclinations, requires the aid of a sustaining power that is neither without nor within, nor anywhere below on earth, but which must reach the suppliant directly and continuously from above.

The Church at Rome, in A.D. 70, was composed of human beings like ourselves, with the difference that this contact with the Infinite had been, up to the present time, of a visible, miraculous and convincing nature. But tonight, one question was uppermost in each mind: Was this the Consummation of the Age? Were they hereafter to see no similitude, no outward sign of the power of God? If not, what trials of their faith lay before them!

Aquila was beckoning; Arthur grasped the hand of his counselor fervently. Heartened by the eloquence of the appeal, he went to his seat as the meeting was called to order. Hymns were sung with gusto and right goodwill; so loudly did their praises ring that the night-watch, patrolling the dark street outside, paused to listen and wonder what strange rites were being performed behind those doors.

The Scriptures were read—first the Prophets, then from one of Paul's mighty Epistles. Aquila spoke briefly, introducing Luke, eyewitness of the Master's ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem, and companion of Paul by land and sea. With graceful dignity the physician-disciple arose and looked out over the anxious, upturned faces.

"Brethren," he said, "I come not to you tonight with a new gospel; it is the old, old story in which you have been so well instructed by our able and holy brother beside me. It is the Word of the unchanging and unchangeable God. From the earliest times the Creator has never deviated from His plan. Well did Paul say, 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.' Affairs in the world of men change with the rise and fall of the tides of humanity, and there is nothing abiding; but God's plan has never changed. To some it may appear to have altered, but it is merely the appearance of the various foreordained phases of the same eternal Plan. He foretold a flood; it came to pass. He foretold the Jewish captivity in Babylon; it came upon the sinful nation, and ended in accordance with the Plan. He foretold the birth and crucifixion of our King; the Word was fulfilled. Through Joel He promised the memorable Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out in moderation to confirm the word. I myself was one of the hundred and twenty in the upper room who saw and felt the fruition of this promise.

"He has also prophesied a 'falling away,' a night of darkness, a space of twelve hundred and sixty years—'a time, times and a half,' as Daniel tells it—in which true religion will be trampled, neglected and unknown. Our glorious Church is doomed to extinction. But—light in the darkness!—He has also revealed that in the last days, just before the

coming of the Lord and the inauguration of His kingdom, it again will arise, and a people of God will cleanse the sanctuary and prepare themselves for a place in the spiritual temple and be ready to receive the King at His coming.

"God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, has provided and is yet providing for this miracle, the resurrection of true religion. He has in past ages revealed His will to His prophets, who preserved it in written form. He has also revealed His will to the Apostles, whose letters you have in your possession. He has moved upon a number of men, of whom I am one, to chronicle the life and teachings of Jesus. Today the Apostles, with one exception, are in the tomb, their work accomplished, their commission fulfilled. Only John remains, an old man, exiled by Nero to the rocky island of Patmos. For several years he has been receiving from time to time visions and revelations of the future of the Church in this world and the next. Some of his earliest revelations are written out and in the possession of certain leaders of the Church. His privilege and work it is to complete the revealed Word, the various fragments and parts of which will be gathered together to serve as the only guide of the Church hereafter, and especially for those beyond the darkness. For our faith must be carried safely across the gulf, and this can only be done in writing. This is also a part of the Plan.

"John on Patmos, brethren and sisters, is the last of the Prophets. When he has finished his work, and when Jerusalem has fallen, *the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from the Church!*

"Paul assures us that 'whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.' When? 'When

that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.' 'The law of the Lord is perfect,' as says the Psalmist; and it is John's province to complete this perfect law. Did not Daniel, instructed by the angel, write: 'Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon *thy holy city*,...to seal up the vision and prophecy'? Did

"Always keep in mind the dignity of your service in the army of the Lord. Remember the words of Paul: 'All things work together for good to them who love God.'"

not our Master say, 'Lo, I am with you...even to the consummation of the age'?

"Brethren, mark well my words. We have reached that end. I stand before you tonight with the last revelation, which is the end of all revelation. Jerusalem has fallen—"

A buzz of excitement ran through the room. When it had subsided, the speaker continued:

"—And we now live in the Age of Faith. There will be no more miracles. Some will *claim* to wield this power hereafter: *Believe them not.* Remember the works you have seen; be convinced by nothing less. Many will go back; such were not of us, but were like those who followed Jesus merely to behold His mighty works and to eat of the loaves and fishes, but had no depth of character.

"Let us accept the new condition with prayerful hearts and a determination to go forward, to finish the work. God has not changed—it is only another phase of His plan. He has been very merciful to us. Even though this power has ceased, we have been highly favored in having seen and experienced so much of it. When it becomes only a memory to us, let us remember that the next generation will have seen nothing; miracles will be to them only a true tradition. A few more years will mark the passing of the last one who

They prayed, fervently and with tears, that their sister might be spared the dreadful trial awaiting her.

has seen with his own eyes the mighty works; and to the gallant little band who will rekindle and hold aloft the torch in the last days, they will be only a matter of history, scoffed at and discredited by an unbelieving world.

"Let us also bear in mind the gravity of our position, for we in this room have tasted the powers of the world to come, and should we fall away, it is impossible to renew us again to repentance—we will have committed the unpardonable sin. Let us so behave ourselves that we may live again in the time of the renewing of the Holy Spirit, when our Lord returns; when His glorious promise shall be fulfilled: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works

than these shall he do'; when the sick of the world shall be healed and all nations be caused to know and acknowledge and serve the true God and his Son."

The exhortation went on; even the most callous felt the power of his burning words as he besought them to carry into the new era the faith and zeal which had given such prosperity to the Church during the short period of the Apostolic Commission. When he had taken his seat, there was a death-like silence in the room; the blow, anticipated as it was, had been a severe one, and each was busy with a turmoil of thoughts, misgivings, and resolutions.

Only for a moment, however, did silence reign, for Miriam, the palace slave, was on her feet. In impassioned tones and with unconsciously dramatic gestures, she told of the desperate plight of Irene, so well known to all present except Luke himself. A murmur of sympathy and indignation arose.

"Is it wrong," queried Miriam, tensely—almost fiercely—"to pray that an exception might be made and this tender flower delivered from the iron heel which threatens to crush it? Will not God hear us—only this once?"

"Why not?" a deep voice asked, as Rufus, convert and friend of Paul, stood up. "There have been exceptions to God's rules in other days. All men are mortal, and the days of our life are threescore and ten, yet Enoch and Elijah were translated that they should not see death. Men have been spared the penalty of the law that they might work out their salvation, as was David. Why may there not be an exception in this case?"

Luke had again taken the stand. Lifting his hand for silence, he spoke slowly and deliberately:

"It may be, brethren, that God will grant us our desire, if it be His will to make this an exceptional

case. As Rufus says, such things have happened and may again, although we must not be faithless if our prayer is not miraculously answered. It may be that the solution lies in our hands—or hers. Nevertheless, we can but try. Let us pray."

And they prayed, fervently and with tears, that their sister might be spared the dreadful trial awaiting her. When the prayer ceased, there was the general and depressing conviction that there had been no answer as in the former days; that they must employ the wisdom heretofore given them to effect a rescue, if indeed rescue were possible. After the benediction, the subject was taken up excitedly by many little groups, each with its proponent of some plan which seemed feasible. Placidus, a swarthy, eagle-eyed Roman youth, leaped upon a bench, gesticulating vehemently.

"Brethren," he cried, "in the days of Appius Claudius, Virginius the tribune slew his daughter with his own hands rather than deliver her into the clutches of the tyrant and a life of shame. And before I will allow Sister Irene to be sent to the training-school, I will sacrifice her with my own hands!"

Horried shouts answered this outburst, and he was about to continue when the heavy hand of Arthur swept him from his stand into the crowd.

"Enough of this, my hot-headed lad," said the Briton. "You would commit murder and lose your own salvation, then lose your head for the crime, and bring persecution on the whole Church. Your idea is all wrong; far better to steal the maiden away before the week is up, and when Hippo comes for her, she will be safely hidden away in some other city."

"Bright boy!" cried Eutropius, scornfully. "Don't you know there is a severe penalty for aiding a slave to

Let Us Pray

Our mighty God, Thou wondrous Being to whom belongs greatness, praise, adoration, strength, and eternity of days, Thou to whom all flesh must come, Thou who knowest the thoughts that come into our minds, every one of them, we praise Thee for all that Thou hast done and art doing for us. We cannot see Thee, yet Thy signature is visible on everything around us. We cannot hear Thee, yet Thy voice echoes constantly through Thy Word, teaching, instructing, reproving, correcting. We cannot touch Thee, yet there is nowhere that we may go from Thy presence.

Lord, we thank Thee for bringing us to another sacred new beginning. We see before us the landscape freshly made. As yet there are no tracks on the whole white slope before us, no grooves cut in the smooth surface of this new year. Help us to move with care, that we may cut a straight path toward the Kingdom, and waste no movements going in circles, or backtracking.

Help us to see each new moment as a time for action, a fresh opportunity from Thee to think right, speak right, do right; an opportunity we cannot afford to let slip by unused. We are exceedingly grateful that Thou art still extending our day of probation, and help us to be wise in its use, making the very most of our time.

Father, guide us in the ordering of our minds, and in the controlling of our imaginations, that we may think on whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; that our life within may be a serene and quiet place where we always put first things first and Thou art all in all.

We thank Thee for Thy great plan, for the knowledge that this beautiful earth was not created in vain, that one day soon, heaven will open its doors and take in the earth, and all sin, sorrow, disappointment, fatigue, frustration, sickness and pain, and even death itself, shall be banished from this planet. Father, we pray Thee to preserve us in faith, that we may see that Day. Give us a strong, abundant, abiding faith, to believe with all our hearts that Thy long silence shall at last be broken by the return of Thy dear Son to earth, that as surely as Thou dost live, all the earth shall be filled with Thy glory.

Father, we pray for all Thy people, for all everywhere whose hearts are one with Thee. And wilt Thou create in us a spirituality so warm and glowing that others may find in us Thy strength for their weakness, Thy peace for their strife, Thy joy for their sorrow, Thy love for their hatred, Thy compassion for their indifference.

Lord, lift up our heads, put a new light in our eyes and a new song in our hearts, and stimulate us to prepare the more earnestly for a place in Thy eternal Kingdom, for which we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

escape? and her connection with the Church is well known. We should all be put to the torture to find where she was hidden, then a string of crucifixions and another persecution, and Irene worse off than before."

Several suggested sending a delegation to plead with Vespasian, but the suggestion was voted down. The emperor had indeed been lenient, but the Christians were licensed as a Jewish sect, and he was the mortal enemy of the Jews just now, and growing more bitter every day. Their committee would not be received.

"Jerusalem has fallen," said Amplias, "but the emperor does not know it. No messenger could have reached Rome from Syria in so short a time. If one of us went and told

him, it might give us enough prestige to save Irene."

"No," was Luke's immediate response, "for in the first place you could not prove it until Titus' messengers arrive, and you would probably be thrown out or jailed as a madman. And if you were credited, it would be as a magician, and when you failed to produce more miracles, you would be scorned or flogged as an impostor. This is the best plan: we will continue to pray for wisdom and try to devise some way of helping the damsel. Much may happen in a week, and if no solution has presented itself by next Friday, I myself will brave the emperor's wrath and plead her case. I am a Roman citizen, although without prestige or influence at court, but Caesar may listen to me. God

never forsakes His own, and if Irene has not finished her work, and is one who will be an heir of salvation, a way of escape will be provided. Remember the promise, 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' Be of good cheer; God still works, though in a different way."

Forlornly hopeful but visibly anxious, the congregation slowly dispersed. Luke turned to Aquila.

"We walk by faith," he said, grimly, "and what a difference!"

"True," was the old man's reply, "but what a difference in the reward. God hath bestowed more abundant honor upon that part which lacked."

(To be continued)

April 3 this year is the beginning of the Sacred New Year and ...



A New Start

The old year is behind us. We cannot change it. Doubtless there is much in it we would *like* to change, some things we regret; but the page is turned, the year is gone, to shame and blame or bless us as the case may be. We are at the top line of the first page. What sort of a start shall we make?

MAKE IT A GRAND, NEW START

Does the world picture seem dismal and beyond help or hope?

The course of human history has never been smooth or even. The year 1810 was said by many of that time to be the "twilight of the race." It was midway between the battle of Trafalgar and Waterloo; yet even in that dark hour, forces were working in ways that people knew nothing about. At that very time there was a lad named Abraham Lincoln playing before the doorway of his mother's cabin in the Kentucky mountains; Alfred Tennyson, the poet-prophet of the English race, was just beginning to dream his dream; and Oliver Wendell Holmes was a babe in his mother's arms. The darkest hour can be the seedbed of new life and power.

And who can know what God is doing this very hour that will bring life and blessing to the world tomorrow!

So let us make it a grand, new start. How can we do this? By taking God into *every moment* of this new year, and living constantly as in His presence.

If this new year is to have any real meaning, if it is to have loftier spiritual attainments, then He who is the source and inspiration of all that is good must stand with us on its threshold.

Trials and temptations are sure to come. Are we ready to meet them? Remember, there is only one way to meet them victoriously. It is to meet them with God, to keep Him as our friend, our Companion and our Guide through every step of the way; to listen to His counsel and fly to obey His every command through all the days,

hours and moments that may be granted us.

Yes, let us make a *grand new start*. If we have wandered in sin, if we have been half-hearted in God's service, let us renew that zeal and love which we had at "first."

No matter how serious the offense or how deeply involved the sin, it *can* be overcome. Even though that sin may have been indulged from early youth; it can be forsaken and replaced with uprightness. God's Word holds out the gracious promise: "If the wicked will *turn* from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die." More than that, "all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him" (Ezek. 18:21-22).

What a promise! what a comfort! If we *turn* from our sins and do what is lawful and right, our transgressions *shall not be mentioned*! Here is a message of hope! We need not be a slave to our past! Now is our great opportunity! Now we can change!

Can we really comprehend the full meaning of this promise? God is saying that if we confess and forsake our sins, He will actually forget they were ever committed.

Says God through Isaiah, "Oh wash yourselves! Be clean! Let me no longer see you doing all these wicked things; quit your evil ways. Learn to do good...Come, let's talk this over! says the Lord; no matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you white as wool!" (Isa. 1:16, 18, Living Bible).

Help is available. The God who starts us will stay with us as long as we stay with Him. A life acting on its faith is not deserted by Him.

Let us make this the day when we move out! If you want to feel the new life stir in your soul, get moving! Burn the bridges behind you. Jesus said that whosoever puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for

the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). These back-lookers are in bad business. They soon become backsliders.

A good start is not everything, but it can contribute to a grand continuing. A car gathers momentum as it moves, and less power is needed to keep going than is required to start. A car must be started in low gear, but a car in motion helps move itself. It is the same with life. A life in motion helps itself. If the start is wrong, it is easier to go wrong; if right, it is easier to go right.

MAKE IT A STRAIGHT START

A new start should be a straight start—not just to do as well as others, but to beat our best!

Are past mistakes and sins holding us back? Does regret and remorse dog our footsteps because we feel we haven't made maximum progress? Do we often despair, stumbling over the same old sins again and again?

Do we feel that the way Christ has mapped out is too long, the requirements too stringent, the life too demanding, that we will never reach our goal?

Let us encourage ourselves in the Lord. Can we not recall days when our faith was strong, our hope radiant, our courage dauntless; when we were determined to let *nothing* hinder our service to God? Those good days should be an assurance to us that we *can complete* the work we have undertaken. For if we can live right for an occasional day, we can do so more often until every day is lived at our very best—for God.

It is often helpful in the Christian life to picture ourselves as we would like to be, as we know we must be to merit the "well done" of the Judge, even though we have not yet reached that height. This is not necessarily wishful thinking, nor an effort to dodge reality. But to succeed requires determination and much reassuring of ourselves that the work *can* be accomplished. And projecting ourselves into the future, to the happy day when we shall have fully attained to the image of Christ, will give us the impetus to turn the picture into reality.

This is an *important* year. Every new day offers golden opportunities that, once gone, will never return.

Continued life is our assurance from God that there is yet a place for us to fill, a purpose to our existence. The very fact that God is extending life to us is a token of our capacity for greater things than we have yet attained, more spirituality than we have yet developed.

We will be tomorrow only what we make of ourselves today. As the days

are passing, are we making maximum spiritual progress? Are we living with one thought—that of our future—continually before us as the all-pervading theme of our life? or are we so concerned with accomplishing the temporal that we fail to give thought to the eternal? Are we deriving from the ordinary its deeper, hidden eternal values?

Let Paul give us the secret of making a straight course. "*I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I'm not just shadowboxing or playing around*" (I Cor. 9:27, Paraphrased).

MAKE IT A SELF-SEARCHING START

As we go about our daily transactions, are we constantly aware "that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do?" that our every word, thought and motive is being weighed?

The only way to assure ourselves of God's approval is to make an honest appraisal of our own heart, a daily self-examination.

By whose rules am I acting? in whose name? in whose strength? to whose glory? What faith, humility, self-denial, and love of God have there been in all my actions?

Do I find myself on the wrong track—do I feel somewhat light and foolish—or sensitive—or irritable? Does my faith and hope in the world to come seem more or less vivid, more or less impelling? Is my absorption with the things of time so complete that it is obscuring my vision of eternity? I must stop at once! How can I travel at maximum speed in the right direction when I cannot every moment feel the surge of determination to win? I must not only meditate and act upon my determination, but it must be a sustained, continuous, single-minded service.

Our great object in time is not to waste our passions and gifts on the things external that we must leave behind but to cultivate within us all that we can carry into the eternal ages.

Let us be always displeased at what we are, if we desire to attain to what we are not; for where we have pleased ourselves, there will we remain. It is a very serious duty, of all duties the most serious, to look into our own character and accurately read our own heart. It is virtually a looking into eternity—into everlasting joy, or everlasting oblivion—for one or the other is sure to result from our life work.

***The God who starts
us will stay with us as
long as we stay with
Him.***



MAKE FIRST THINGS FIRST

Seeking first the Kingdom of God is a command involving all our mind, all our strength, all our devotion. It is a time-consuming effort which cannot be divided with lesser loyalties. The depth of our desire is proved by the intensity of our effort.

By nature, by habit, and by practice, we were sinners. But the time past of our lives should suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles. With fervent love for our Maker and the transforming power of His Word, we must daily be presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

We should be on our guard against becoming overstressed so that the first and most important thing—seek-

Are we giving God our strength, our time, the vigor of our body, the acuteness of our mind, the devotion of our heart?

ing *first* the Kingdom—slips out of our lives. We must take time to be holy; there is no other way to have God *first* in our lives.

And holiness is something we must do for ourselves. Said Paul, "Set your affection on things above" (Col. 3:2).

People follow their hearts. What men love they go after. Let our treasures be in Heaven and we will climb toward them. Observe the words of the text; *God* does not "set your affections"; you set them yourselves. You can ask your brothers and sisters to pray that your affections will be set right, but they cannot do it for you; you must do it yourself. You can associate with people who will help you either to be lifted up or dragged down. But you yourself are in control. You have willpower. You control your optic nerve. You can let your eyes gaze upon the best, or on sights that fan the flames of the flesh. The choice is yours.

MAKE IT A SINCERE START

A student was asked to define sincerity. Her answer: "Sincerity is to speak as we think."

Webster defines sincerity as "free from dissimulation, without deceit, pretense or hypocrisy, truthful, faithful,

unfeigned, wholehearted, wholesouled, marked by genuineness."

Could there be a better definition of the man or woman who is eager and anxious to be right before God?

Paul ruled out all sham and pretense when he wrote to Timothy: "Give your whole attention, all your energies, to these things, so that your progress is plain for all to see" (I Tim. 4:15, Phillips).

To the Philippian brethren he again stressed the importance of sincerity: "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness" (Phil. 1:10-11).

"That ye may be sincere and without offense" is the qualification demanded by the great God. Insincerity is a perversion common to human nature, a sin we must constantly guard against. It is so much easier to feign submission to God's law than to actually make a full and complete surrender. If our love of eternal life is truly sincere, our *lips* and lives will agree.

To those hungering and thirsting for the grand things of eternity, there will be no such thing as living a double life. If we long to be among those privileged ones who will travel the high road to Zion, singing their hearts out for very joy, we will loathe insincerity. Our lives will be an open book for all to read. Face saving will be abhorred as a sin not befitting a true child of God.

Writing to Timothy, Paul enumerated a long list of appalling sins practiced by those living in the end times. He concluded, "They will maintain a facade of 'religion', but their conduct will deny its validity" (II Tim. 3:5).

If this year be granted us, may we be able to say "I have made this a sincere year."

MAKE IT THE FINEST YEAR!

Winston Churchill once wrote a book entitled, *Their Finest Hour*. That book had to do with bearing hardships in time of war. We Christians are in a war of a different kind. It is a "fine hour" when the best stirs us to come to a summit on life's rough road, when we are lifted to a glimpse of the shoreline of eternity that sends determination surging to the front until we make a new resolution, saying, I will shake off my shabby habits, crucify my lusts, snap the shackles and be free!"

Are we giving God our strength, our time, the vigor of our body, the acuteness of our mind, the devotion of our heart?

Fellow runner, let us make this year the best year of our lives! Let our daily motto be: "Forgetting what lies behind me and with hands outstretched to whatever lies ahead I go *straight for the goal!*"

MM



What "Twelve Tribes"?

"If natural Israel is not the chosen race to inherit God's promised blessings, why does Revelation 7 enumerate the 144,000 chosen ones as 12,000 from each tribe? And why is the book of James addressed to the 'twelve tribes which are scattered abroad'? And why did Paul stand upon the promised made to the 'twelve tribes' (Acts 26:6-7)?"

We know that the book of Revelation uses many different figures, and the "twelve tribes" in chapter 7 could easily be another figure, but every figure must have meaning. And what is that meaning?

God did choose the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, the natural twelve tribes, as a people with which He could work, and through whom and to whom He could reveal His law, His statutes, and have written the Word of Life which would be for the informing and teaching of future generations.

And just as God worked with natural Israel, which consisted of twelve tribes, from whom He selected those who would be part of His plan, just so God also has a spiritual Israel, a people selected out of the masses of humanity by their knowledge of God and their acquaintance with His plan. These also are spoken of as "twelve tribes," spiritual tribes, and out of these He is selecting the members of His future Kingdom.

We learn of these two Israels from Romans 9:6-9, where we read: "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all [spiritual] Israel, which are of [natural] Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children [of God]: but In Isaac [Christ] shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Here Paul plainly states that all natural Israelites are not children of God.

Paul again makes very clear that there are two classes of Israelites, literal and spiritual, in his letter to the Romans: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly;

neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

Jesus said the same in these words: "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16). Out of the world at large God calls the "many," the spiritual twelve tribes, those whom He enlightens with His law of life. From among these the "few" (the faithful) are chosen on the basis of the character they develop. These select ones are the number to be "sealed" or saved. This is why Revelation 7 speaks of the 144,000 chosen ones as being chosen out of the twelve tribes, out of spiritual Israel out of the "many" whom God calls and enlightens, to receive the blessing of salvation. Thus the "few," the 144,000, are chosen "of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev. 7:4).

James uses the "twelve tribes" with the same meaning. We read: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count if all joy when ye fall into divers temptations..." (James 1:1-2). James is addressing his brethren as spiritual Israel or "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," those chosen out of the world and informed of the knowledge of God, hence "My brethren." They are the same twelve tribes, or spiritual Israel, out of which the saved will be chosen on the basis of character and character alone.

The apostle Peter again speaks of this Israel, emphasizing that they are a spiritual house, not natural-born Jews. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5).

Jesus describes the same using the figure of the vine and the branches. "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He says. "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:...If a man abide not in me, he

is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Not all the branches of the vine abide eternally, only those that bear fruit. Just so, all the (spiritual) twelve tribes will not be eternally saved, only those individuals among them who prove worthy by virtue of a righteous life. And these latter ones are represented figuratively in Revelation 7 as 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes.

Paul uses the "twelve tribes" in the same sense in his defense before Agrippa, where he says, "Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake...I am accused of the Jews" (Acts 26:6-7).

We can be sure that Paul was not speaking of the literal ten tribes, because at this time ten of those original tribes had been widely scattered, and the only readily identifiable segments of Israel were the two tribes known as Jews, who had recently rejected Jesus' teaching and instigated His crucifixion—and these could hardly be described as "instantly serving God day and night."

No, Paul was speaking of the nation of spiritual Israel, those who were serving in the hope of eternal life, among whom Paul himself stood. And out of this nation of spiritual Israel, or "twelve tribes," would come those who would prove faithful and be granted a place in Christ's eternal Kingdom. MM

LETTERS

Abortion Only A Symptom

It's likely that you will come under heavy criticism from Christians who disagree, sometimes violently, with the courageous stand on abortion that you set forth in this month's issue (February).

I just want to say: "Thank you!" Thank you for following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who worked to change the individual hearts of men and women, rather than the laws of man. The problems of the world cannot be solved by pickets or politicians, but by Christ alone. Scripture is very clear on this, as you point out.

Keep up the good work. A true prophet tells the truth, as you do in this regard, instead of oversimplifying and telling people what they want to hear. Abortion is only a symptom and not the problem itself. We cannot have the life that God intends for us by changing a law.

Texas

T. G.

Keep Checking

Truly we need to check on ourselves through these busy days, to see what we have really done wrong. It is so easy to do some little thing not to the glory of God.

God *knows* best what we need; we just *think* we know at times.

It is really easy to get our wants and needs mixed up, if not very careful.

South Carolina

H. C.

Keep Shining!

If the clouds are raining, do not start complaining;
That the earth is gaining should not make you sad!
Do not be a fretter; singing is much better;
And the sun will shine to make the whole earth glad.

To think that Romans 2:7 can be experienced by *us* someday, if we are faithful. Real life *can be ours!* Oh, to be ready when our Lord returns!

Crewe, England

N. T.

Welcome, New Year!

(Continued from page 2)

this year. Not all of us will have the opportunity of welcoming another new year. But let us thank God for each day as He gives it, knowing that if we truly live to Him, should our life end we will not be forgotten, for our name will be penned in His book of remembrance, and when the time is right He will call us forth to stand once again upon the earth, to receive for what we have done.

For the serious believer, this will be a good year *whatever* comes. It cannot be otherwise, because God is good and will allow only what is for our best. His hand

is not shortened that He cannot save. His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear. Only our iniquities separate us from Him. And if we but remove these, the way is clear for Him to help us.

So we say, Welcome, New Year! Welcome all that it brings, of trial or blessing, of adversity or pleasure. With God we can welcome all, knowing that nothing will come that we cannot use to the building of a new and better self, a character which He can perpetuate through the ages to come.

May God help us in this great endeavor.

MM

*We say we love the Word of God,
We say we know 'tis true,
We quote a passage here and there,
But seldom think it through.*

*When God denies us "something good," He is
only designing to give us "something better."*

*If Christ is the center of our lives, the circum-
ference will take care of itself.*

*Oh Father, hear!
The way is dark, and I would feign discern
What steps to take, into which path to turn;
Oh! make it clear.*

*We cannot choose happiness either for ourselves
or for another; we must make it out of the oppor-
tunities that lie around us.*

*What e'er my God ordains is right;
Though I the cup must drink
That bitter seems to my faint heart,
I will not fear nor shrink.*

*There may be many who feel the irksomeness
of the duties of life, and a spirit within that
revolts against them.*

*To get up every morning with a firm resolve to
find pleasure in those duties, and do them
well, and finish them as work which God has
given us to do, this is to drink Christ's cup.
The humblest occupation has in it the disci-
pline for the highest rewards of heaven.*

*Often those of whom we speak least on earth are
best known in heaven.*



No matter what your lot, build something on it.

*It is not by seeking more fertile regions, where
toil is lighter, circumstances happier, and free
from the difficult complications and troublesome
people—but by bringing the high courage of a
determined heart, clear in principle and aim, to
bear upon what is given us, that we make each
day a preparation for the Kingdom of God.
If we cannot work out the will of God where
God has placed us, then why has He placed us
there?*

The tests of life are to make, not break us.

*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant hears,
Speak peace to my anxious soul,
And help me to feel that all my ways
Are under Thy wise control.*

*C*ome let us anew
Our journey pursue,
With vigour arise
And press to our home, the magnificent prize!
Of heavenly birth,
Though wandering on earth,
This is not our place;
But strangers and pilgrims ourselves we confess.

*A*t Jesus's call
We gave up our all,
The pleasures of sin,
A place in His glorious Kingdom to win;
longing we pine
the country behind;
But onward we go
Still seeking that fair better country to know.

A country of joy,
Without any alloy,
We thither repair:
Our hearts and our treasure already are there.
We march hand in hand
To Immanuel's land;
No matter what fear
We encounter on earth; for Eternity's near.

*T*hough rough be our way,
Though short be our stay,
The tempests that rend
Only drive us ahead with the fury they spend;
The fiercer the blast,
The sooner 'tis past,
The troubles that come
Shall come to our rescue and hasten us home.

—Selected.