

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

February 2022

Bless the Lord

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Wolf Lake, Minnesota

*Bless
the Lord
of my soul*

THE HEBREW WORD *barakh*, which is usually translated “bless” means “to bestow ability for success” (from the greater person to the lesser) or “to praise a person’s ability for success” (from the lesser person to the greater). It refers to bending the knee or to kneel: to bless God as an act of adoration, to bless man as a benefit to him. To bless

the Lord is to speak of His greatness, His mercy, His kindness, and His grace. The list could go on and on.

The psalmist speaks of this wonderfully in *Psalm 103: A Psalm of David. Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the Lord, O my soul.*

Another way to consider blessings is to look at the contradictory word which is cursing. When we bless someone

we are speaking well of them and when we curse someone we are speaking evil about them. David in this psalm speaks highly of the Lord, he blesses the Lord. In fact he reminds himself and us as the reader/hearer of this psalm that we are to do this with all of our being. We are to praise God with all of our might and strength; in essence with our very lives, because our lives belong to Him. We read in this psalm that things have changed for us as far as our standing with God is concerned. We who are fallen have been restored. We who are mortal have been given immortality. We who are sinful have had our sins removed. We who deserve punishment because of our rebellion have received a pardon. God in His kindness has exercised mercy toward us; and not just a little mercy, but mercy that is eternal. We have received blessing from our God even though we deserved a curse. God speaks His grace into our lives through the finished work of Christ: His shed blood covers our sins and His powerful resurrection lifts us from the realm of death and cursing into the realm of life and blessing. We are of all people most blessed because *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.* We bless God because He has taken us out of our oppression and has not rewarded us according to our sins, but rather He took our sins and laid them on His Son so that we would be made right through Him: *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

So come to church and bless the Lord. Speak of Him who is our Redeemer and Savior. Speak of Him who doesn't give you what you deserve but rather what you don't. Speak of Him who would be just in exercising His wrath toward us who are sinners, but chose instead to exercise His mercy toward us. Come into His courts with thanksgiving and into His throne room with praise. Come to the place where we find grace to help in time of need, the place where we find mercy and forgiveness.

Come to the Author and Finisher of your faith. Come to Jesus who endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. There you will find mercy, there you will find grace, there you will find forgiveness, and there you will find rest for your weary soul. Come to church and let us “Bless the Lord.” ~

Isaiah 6: Vision of Jehovah in His Temple

Paul Kretzmann

JEHOVAH REVEALED IN HIS GLORY. — V. 1. **In the year that King Uzziah died**, that is, in the last year of this king's successful reign (2 Kings 15, 1-7; 2 Chronicles 26), in the year 758 B. C., **I saw also the Lord**, the All-powerful, **sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up**, the prophetic vision, beyond the range of the normal ability of human senses, permitting the prophet to see the revelation of God, not face to face—for God dwells in an inaccessible light—but in a manner which uncovered the divine glory to his inner mind, **and his train filled the Temple**, that is, His kingly robe with its majestic train, fitting emblem of the divine glory, covered and filled the heavenly Sanctuary.

V. 2. **Above it stood the seraphim**, heavenly spirits of the highest rank, ministers of the Lord serving as guardians of the throne. **Each one had six wings**, in accordance with their nature as heavenly beings; **with twain he covered his face**, for even the seraphim cannot endure the sight of the essential holiness of God, **and with twain he covered his feet**, for even the angels, with a proper feeling of humility and modesty, prefer to keep their forms covered before the eyes of the Most Holy One, **and with twain he did fly**, floating about the throne of the Lord.

V. 3. **And one cried unto another**, in a wonderful antiphonal chorus, **and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts**, thrice holy not only on account of the supreme excellence of His essential holiness, but also on account of the Trinity of persons, each of which is the possessor of the divine holiness in its fullness and glory; **the whole earth is full of His glory**, literally, “filling the whole earth is His glory”; for all men on earth will see the revelation of His divine majesty, all His works, in creation, redemption, sanctification, will serve to magnify Him as the supreme and only God (Compare Revelation 4:8).

V. 4. **And the posts of the door**, the foundations of the sills, or thresholds, the heavenly temple with its portals down to the lowest foundation, **moved at the voice of him that cried**, the powerful sound of the entire chorus, **and the house was filled with smoke**, as from the incense of all the prayers of the saints, uniting with the angels above to give praise and adoration to the great Lord of heaven (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4).

V. 5. **Then said I**, overcome with awe and terror at the tremendous impressiveness of the scene, **Woe is me! for I am undone**, lost, threatened with death and destruction, **because I am a man of unclean lips**, the feeling of his own sinfulness coming over him all the more strongly in view of the perfect holiness which he had just seen, **and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips**, descendant and member of a generation of sinners; **for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**, between whom and man is not only the gulf separating the Creator from His creatures,

but the greater abyss between the holy God and the world of sinners (Compare Exodus 33:20).

V. 6. **Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar**, the altar of incense evidently being referred to.

V. 7. **And he laid it upon my mouth**, he caused the glowing coal to come into contact with the prophet's lips, **and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged**, atoned for. The act of the angel evidently had a symbolical meaning, first of all with reference to the atonement made in and through the person of Jesus Christ, the work of redemption carried out in accordance with the Triune God's counsel. Not only, however, is the prophet, sinful man as he was, assured of the grace of God, but the Lord also imparts special strength to him and fits him to be the instrument of His inspiration.

THE MISSION OF THE PROPHET. — V. 8. **Also I heard the voice of the Lord**, of the All-powerful, the great Ruler of the universe, **saying, Whom shall I send?** the call being for volunteers to proclaim the atonement set forth in the vision just vouchsafed the prophet. **And who will go for Us?** the persons of the Trinity here consulting together in this very important matter. **Then said I, Here am I; send me.** The prophet, in the spirit of voluntary service wrought by the Lord, a principal requisite for the proper and effective

ministry of the Word, is ready to undertake the task.

V. 9. **And He said, Go and tell this people**, to which He no longer refers as His people, but as strangers, in the third person, **Hear ye indeed**, constantly within reach of the Word of God, **but understand not**, the words making no impression upon mind and heart; **and see ye indeed**, namely, the great works of God by which He reveals Himself to mankind, **but perceive not**, not really grasping their significance or applying them to their own condition. The judgment of God is now proclaimed as carried out upon the Jews during eight centuries and more.

V. 10. **Make the heart of this people fat**, insensitive to impressions for good, so that feeling, reason, and will would become callous, **and make their ears heavy**, the hearing of the mind becoming impaired beyond the possibility of understanding, **and shut their eyes**, namely, those of the spirit, **lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert**, that is, be converted, and be healed. Note that the members or organs spoken of are given in inverted order in the second part of the sentence, to increase its impressiveness. It is the judicial hardening, the judgment of obduration, which is here described, for if people deliberately and maliciously reject God's offers of salvation, He may punish them in the manner here described, so that the message which otherwise works salvation becomes to them a savor of death unto death (Compare 2 Corinthians 2:16; Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27). It is not that God works

obduration, but He surrenders the godless to their evil will; He withdraws from their hearts with His Holy Spirit.

V. 11. **Then said I, Lord, how long?** that is, how long would this hardening continue? **And He answered, Until the cities be wasted,** altogether desolate, **without inhabitant, and the houses without man,** without a protector, **and the land be utterly desolate,** literally, “made desolate a desert.”

V. 12. **And the Lord have removed men far away,** by having them led away into exile, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

V. 13. **But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return and shall be eaten,** literally, “And if there is yet in it a tenth,

it will once more become subject to devouring”; **as a teil-tree, a terebinth, and as an oak, whose substance is in them,** a mere stump being left, **when they cast their leaves,** when they are felled, **so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof,** the stump or stem. Thus the obduration upon Israel would continue until the last wrath would come upon Israel, resulting in its destruction. And yet, after the trunk would be hewn down, the stump which remained would bring forth new shoots, a people consecrated to God. As in Israel, so in all the nations of the world the Lord has His holy seed, people who by His grace accept the Gospel and are saved. ~

Christ's Work

Moreover, the Son of God has assumed this human nature, however, without sin, and therefore not a foreign, but our own flesh, into the unity of His person, and according to it is become our true Brother. *Hebrews 2:14: Forasmuch, then, as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.* Again, *16; 4:15: He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, yet without sin.*

In like manner Christ has also redeemed it as His work, sanctifies it as His work, raises it from the dead, and gloriously adorns it as His work. But original sin He has not created, assumed, redeemed, sanctified; nor will He raise it, will neither adorn nor save it in the elect, but in the blessed resurrection it will be entirely destroyed.

Hence the distinction between the corrupt nature and the corruption which infects the nature and by which the nature became corrupt, can easily be discerned.

But, on the other hand, we believe, teach, and confess that original sin is not a slight, but so deep a corruption of human nature that nothing healthy or uncorrupt has remained in man's body or soul, in his inner or outward powers, but, as the Church sings: *Through Adam's fall is all corrupt, Nature and essence human.*

This damage is unspeakable, and cannot be discerned by reason, but only from God's Word.

And [we affirm] that no one but God alone can separate from one another the nature and this corruption of the nature, which will fully come to pass through death, in the blessed resurrection, where our nature which we now bear will rise and live eternally without original sin and separated and sundered from it, as it is written *Job 19:26: I shall be compassed again with this my skin, and in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold.*

Formula of Concord

The devil's work is to crush us under his feet and, because of our sin, to dispatch us from life into death... Christ's works are truly divine works such as: to justify, to restore to life, to save.

Martin Luther

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 1:15 - 2:13

The Greedy King and the Wise Men

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

I hope this day finds you all well and with Christmas past, that the story of Jesus is still precious and hidden in your heart as you continue this new year.

NOW WHEN JESUS WAS BORN, there was an ungodly king who was ruling over Israel. He liked being king, and in fact he liked it so much that it all went to his head and he didn't want anyone else to take his place.

When Jesus was born, there were wise men far away in another part of the country who studied the stars in the heaven. On a given day they were shown a special star and God's Spirit told them it meant the King of the Jews had been born. These wise men knew of the prophecy of the Messiah who was to come.

In the Old Testament the prophet *Isaiah (7:14)* spoke these words, *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* God's Spirit worked in the wise men's hearts and they wanted to follow the star and find this baby. This was 700 years after *Isaiah* prophesied. We know nothing is impossible with God. What He says He will do, He does.

These wise men traveled for several months before reaching Jerusalem. The Bible does not say how they traveled, but I like to think that they most likely rode on camels. Camels were a common sort of travel in the desert places because they have feet made for walking on sand, can go several days without a lot of food or water and they are good for carrying loads and people.

When the wise men reached Jerusalem they went to the king (Herod) saying, *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:2-3)

Why is Herod so troubled? He has just heard about a baby who is also called a king, and Herod's thinking that this baby will take the peoples mind off of him as king, and that he will lose his throne. In his greedy heart and mind he doesn't want this to happen.

The Bible tells us that Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes (writers) together and asked them where Jesus was born. They told him, "Bethlehem of Judea."

Herod called the wise men to him and asked them when they had seen the star. He then sent them to go find the baby, and when they had to come back and tell him so he could go worship Him too (Matthew 2:8). Herod was quickly thinking a very wicked plan, and that was to kill this baby.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo (behold, look), the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (Matthew 2:9-10)

They had followed the star for about two to three months. It led them to Jesus who was not in the manger any more for He was close to two years old. The Bible says, *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)*

I just marvel at the holiness of the baby Jesus. The Bible says that when Jesus returns all people will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord. To me that is so beautiful.

This brings us back to what Herod is doing with his evil plan. God warned the wise men not to go back to Herod but to go on their way home by another road. I'm so thankful the wise men listened to God's direction.

This made Herod very angry, so he decided to have all children in Bethlehem who were two years old and younger, put to death. From the time the wise men had seen the star until now was about two years, so Jesus would have been close to that age. Herod was sure he was going to get Jesus one way or another. How greedy his heart was, but this is what happened and there was much sadness. Did Jesus die at the hands of Herod's soldiers? No, God was protecting Him and He was safe in Egypt where an angel of God had told Joseph to go.

Jesus did end up living in Nazareth as the prophets had said He would (Matthew 2:23). Jesus was about three years old when they came there.



This Christmas story has such a happy beginning and also a happy ending as far as what I have told you, but this is a story that lives in our hearts and has no end. Jesus is never-ending and will do much for each of you children all the days of your life because He loves you. Jesus will choose to pour on you His blessings, and there will be so many you may not even be able to count them.

Jesus will be with you and go before you through this year, and I pray that you will keep Him as your best friend.

God's peace.

The Millennium

John H. Lumijarvi (1854 – 1923); Brownsmead, Oregon

Submitted by Elizabeth Staudinger; Leslieville, Alberta, Canada

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6

MANY EXPOUNDERS OF THE SCRIPTURES believe that a time is at hand when Christ will come to earth with His saints to reign here a thousand years. They believe this to be the first resurrection.

These truly are deep and high matters to comprehend. We will state our understanding in a few words.

Before the birth of Christ, the old Pharisaic church expected an earthly Savior, even as the Jews still await His coming. This is the result of wrong understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Only a few awaited a spiritual Savior, namely those who sighed in their sorrow and cried to God in the spirit. The Savior came not to be an earthly king, but to save the souls of men, or the world, from the power of sin, death and the devil, as was promised already in Paradise.

Today, also, there are the few who long for and await the spiritual Savior to save their souls from the power of the prince of hell. We believe that by the blessing of Jesus and the grace of God, we have food, clothing, and all the support of the body already here in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* (2 Peter 3:13) The millennial teachers explain this Scripture to mean that Jesus will come with His saints to reign a thousand years on this earth. But Jesus Himself says, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Matthew 28:20)

He has come once, was born in the stable of Bethlehem 1919 years ago, and fulfilled all that His Father commanded Him. Reconciliation came through Him on the cross at Golgotha, not for us only, but for all the world. He will come in glory a second time, to judge all men, and will not tarry here a thousand years. We may read of His coming to judgment (in Matthew 25:31 and others), wherein all the ungodly will be destroyed, and the righteous shall be united to partake of their gracious reward before Him and the glorious face of the Father and the holy angels from everlasting to everlasting. There are two deaths and two

resurrections according to the Holy Scriptures. There are spiritual death and eternal death. The words quoted above treat of the first resurrection and the second death.

The first resurrection takes place in man in new birth. Therein he is changed from death to life, from sin to righteousness. This new creation occurs in the Holy Spirit by the bloody death of Jesus and by the power of His resurrection. In it the sins of one who is penitent and has heartfelt sorrow are forgiven for the sake of the name and blood of Jesus. He is thus free from accusation.

The spirit of antichrist is now in the world. It has always persecuted Christ and His holy congregation, and shall do so to the end. Read 2 Thessalonians 2. *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.* (2 Thessalonians 2:7) (The Finnish text explains this way: “The mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now until he be taken out of the way.”) The spirit of antichrist must succeed in taking the constitutions of the nations out of the way. Then it will be loosed. This happened in Finland in 1918, and in France in 1572. This spirit teaches disobedience to God’s Holy Word, and strives to bring about lawlessness on earth. Or, the times and customs that already are in the “Christian” world!

However, blessed are they whose names are written in heaven. Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered. *Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.* (Psalm 32:2) *Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.* (Matthew 24:46) *But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* (2 Peter 3:8) The martyrs and all the righteous have been partakers of the millennium, as we now are also, in the kingdom of grace and forgiveness of sins. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* (Revelation 2:7) The overcomers are the believers. *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* (1 John 5:4) Pray without ceasing.

John Lumijarvi was one of the old pastors of our Laestadian heritage who immigrated to the U.S. from Finland.

From Kristillinen Kuukauslehti, February 1920

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Genesis 3:15

THIS IS THE PROMISE OF a Saviour when it was first given of God. The amazing thing about this is that the blessed words were spoken in rebuke to the serpent, Satan, in the presence of our first parents. I, God, will make the seed of the woman, Christ, your enemy, and He will bruise, crush, your head. He will win in the great battle with you over man’s soul. He will come out the eternal Victor and your kingdom will be vanquished. He will open the way to Heaven for the entire fallen race of man. Were they listening? We see how that as soon as Cain was born, they thought that the Saviour was given, but they found out differently. The real question today is, Are we listening? Have we heard, and, yea, rejoiced, in the promise of the Saviour? Have we seen and believed the promise fulfilled in Christ from the manger to the cross? Have we experienced it for our own hearts? Can we say like Thomas when his unbelief was cast out for a moment, My Lord and my God!? We have not seen Him in the flesh, but in the Spirit by faith. Jesus says, Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed. Lord Jesus, bless us with Thy promise again today and all the way to the end!

Paul Coponen; Chassell, Michigan

Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire

Our Three Homes

Börje Mård, Finland

Rauhan Sana, November 1999, translated by Martha Kulla

IN HIS LOVE AND GRACE, God wants us to have an earthly home and a spiritual home here in this world, and a heavenly home to come. It is our Father's will that the bond between those three homes is love to God and to our neighbor. With a prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit, I want to study what these homes signify to us.

Our Earthly Home

The foundation of the happiness and blessing of a home is laid when one begins to seek for a mate. It is important to bring this matter before God, asking Him to give a believing, life-long partner. After a man and woman have promised before God to love each other in prosperity and adversity alike, they are united by God's Word and become a married couple. In this covenant, they become one flesh, and begin to live together in their own home. The covenant they have made is unto death, for *what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.* (Matthew 19:6)

Happiness, peace, and blessings are obtained for the home when Jesus lives in our hearts and in our homes. God, who is love, has given the gift of love between husband and wife. Love is like a flower that will fade sooner or later if it is not nourished. This is why we must care for this beautiful flower.

When children are born, the parents are given the great responsibility to raise them in love, teaching them to know Jesus, the Friend of children. Christianity must begin in the home. In many families, children have been adopted and received with love. The door of the house and the arms of the parents have been opened to these children.

Blessed are the children who can grow up in a Christian home, surrounded by a father's and mother's love. Where the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name and blood, is preached, love is preserved pure and unbroken between parents and children.

The enemy of the soul has beguiled us all into such haste that we scarcely have time for each other or for our children. Dear young parents: give your children all the time that you possibly can, for that which is learned from Father and Mother is never forgotten. God bless our homes!

Our Spiritual Home

It is a great blessing to have a spiritual home. There, with brothers and sisters in faith, we can listen to God's Word, sing hymns, and discuss the way and the pilgrimage. When God, by His Spirit, speaks to His people, a feeling of thankfulness arises that we are part of this spiritual home. This is also an inn and a hospital, where help and comfort are found for the needy, and where we are prepared to help others.

In the spiritual home, the Gospel resounds to poor ones who confess their sins and seek for grace. Heavenly manna descends as food for hungry souls. Living waters bubble up from the open fountains of Zion for thirsty souls. The thanks and praise to God from the travelers on the narrow way are heard in the congregation, where Jesus promises to be present.



But the devil is also there. He tempts us as he tempted Jesus. He has so much to offer. He wants us to despise God's people and seek something new. Paul wrote: *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* (2 Timothy 3:14-15) Let us be joyful when we have met Jesus by faith, and have received a spiritual home, where we can always remain content.

If we have been separated from this fellowship for a longer time, we yearn to be there. There are all the dear ones: fathers and mothers carrying their little children in their arms, young boys and girls, friends, grandparents, young adults, and elders of the congregation. They are all one big family. Amongst them, we hear greetings of "God's peace," and we feel we are at home. We understand that this is a flock which is on its way to heaven, and we want to travel with this flock. Dear Father, bless our congregation and our spiritual home!

Our Heavenly Home

Heaven is the place where God, our Father, lives with His angels. Jesus, our Savior, is there at the Father's right hand, praying for us. God created man to live with Him here on earth and in the future life. That is why He has prepared us a home in heaven.

Jesus said: *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* (John 14:2-3)

Eternal life is the untold blessedness and beauty of God's children in heaven with God. It begins already here in the heart of every person who believes in Christ. It becomes a reality with the saints before God.

There will be no distress or care in our heavenly home. We will behold God face to face, and praise Him for ever. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Finally, I want to pause at these words in the book of Revelation: *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* (Revelation 7:13-17)

May the heavenly Father grant us His help, grace, and strength to walk so that one day we will be together in our everlasting home with Him. ~

A Song of Ascents

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

OUR OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF Psalms is the hymnal of the people of Israel. The psalms—songs—are categorized in different ways, for example, as psalms of praise or thanksgiving or lament.

Fifteen of the psalms (numbers 120 through 134) have this special title: “A Song of Degrees” (KJV) or “A Song of Ascents” (ESV). What does that mean?

Some scholars say that the people of Israel sang these fifteen songs as they went up to Jerusalem to attend the special Old Testament feasts: the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost (Weeks), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). Others say that the Levites sang them as they went up the fifteen steps to serve in the Temple. Still others say that the Levites sang them on the fifteen steps that went up from the Court of the Women to the Court of Israel.

Did you notice in all cases that the singers were *ascending* as they sang?

The city of Jerusalem was set on seven hills, and Mount Zion was the site of the Temple. Every direction was downhill from Jerusalem. When you went up to the holy city, you were literally *ascending* hills. When you went up to the Temple to participate in the great feasts, you were literally *ascending* Mount Zion. When the Levites and the Temple singers went up to serve in the Temple, they were *ascending* stairs.

But how does this relate to our New Testament worship? A few more psalms give us a hint:

*Who shall **ascend into the hill of the Lord?** or **who shall stand in his holy place?** He that hath **clean hands, and a pure heart**; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (Psalm 24:3-5)*

*Lord, **who shall abide in thy tabernacle?** **who shall dwell in thy holy hill?** He that **walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth** in his heart. (Psalm 15: 1-2)*

Who can ascend the hill of the Lord? Who can stand in His holy presence? When we look for the answer to these questions, we certainly cannot look within ourselves. But Who has clean hands and a pure heart? Our Jesus. Who walks uprightly and works righteousness? Our Jesus. Who not only speaks the truth, but is Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life? Our Jesus!

Many familiar verses are in the Songs of Ascents. Do you recognize any of these?

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. (Psalm 122:1)

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)

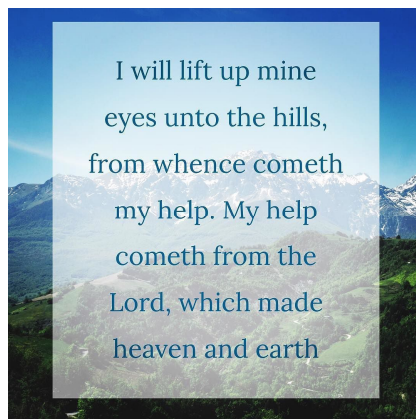
They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:5-6)

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. (Psalm 127:3)

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. (Psalm 130:1-4)

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)



Here is my favorite Song of Ascents:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall

preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. (Psalm 121)

I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. (Psalm 3:4)

When we cry unto the Lord, He hears us from His holy hill, and He answers. We can sing these Songs of Ascents with a thankful heart for our Jesus, Who has Himself fulfilled the requirements of the Law and clothed us with His righteousness. Thanks be to God. ~

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All Things New

Pastor Jason Salmi
Vancouver, Washington

WITH THE DAWNING OF A new year, our thoughts generally turn to change. We reflect back over the past year and what has changed. And we look forward to what the next year might bring. As we do so, it is good to reflect on God's work in our lives over the past year, and what He has in store for us in the new.

This last year (or two) has brought a significant amount of change for most of us. Life is different now than we could have possibly anticipated with the whole world reacting to the onset of the COVID-19 virus. On top of that, tensions in our nation have increased dramatically around race and socio-economic issues. And far too many of us have experienced the death of someone close to us.

Trying to make sense of what God has been doing in and through all of this can be challenging. Some will inevitably be tempted to doubt whether God is really working at all. Or one might come to the conclusion that God will, in the future, finally begin to work when He brings this age to a close.

But looking towards that future also helps us understand what God is doing now. In the book of Revelation, the twenty-first chapter begins with John seeing a vision of "a new heaven and a new earth." He sees the final fulfillment of God's promise that a day is coming when all of our sorrow will be exchanged for joy, and that God Himself will *wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.* (Revelation 21:4)

Far from God merely holding out a future hope to us, the promise He gives is for the present as well. Because, as soon as John sees that vision and hears that promise, he goes on to write, *And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.* (Revelation 21:5-6a)

There is no time or place where God is not currently at work for the good of His people. Yes, a future day is coming when God will make all things new. But He tells us that He is, even now, making all things new. It's important to remember that the One that is speaking to John is the same One who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)." When the Son of God came in the flesh, lived, died and rose again, He completed there and then the work of our salvation, as well as the redemption of all of creation. Therefore He can say, "It is done!"

We can't see with our eyes how God is making all things new. But by faith, we can see that it is true. Amid all the pain, suffering, turmoil and loss, God is at work to gather sinners into His kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. And those of us who call Him Lord are, even now, citizens of that eternal kingdom. So regardless of what this next year may bring, dear Saints, we can live in quiet confidence that God is making all things new. God is with you in this New Year. ~

We should give thanks to God, I say, because we have such a Savior who is able to cover us and to count our sin as nothing. For God's mercy is pardoning and love is meanwhile forgiving, and God really takes sin in such a way that it does not remain sin, because he begins materially to purge and to forgive completely. On no condition is sin a passing phase, but we are justified daily by the unmerited forgiveness of sins and by the justification of God's mercy. Sin remains, then, perpetually in this life, until the hour of the last judgment comes and then at last we shall be made perfectly righteous. For this is not a game or delusion, that we say, 'Sins are forgiven by faith and only cling to us, because that newness of life has miraculously begun.' In short, the term 'to be justified' means that a man is considered righteous.

Martin Luther

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:1-8