

### **336 Bless the Lord, O my soul**

In the annual round of the Christian calendar we have come again to Ascension Day leading through to Pentecost Sunday next week. In the midst of the many current uncertainties nationally and internationally, both of these anniversaries are timely for they encourage us “to look up and beyond”, away from the immediate present to the dealings of Almighty God on His much longer and grander scale.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1.1-4, KJV).

God the Father, in His loving intention to redeem His newly-fallen creation, bid His Son to enter into this creation Himself. “The Word”, the Lord Jesus Christ, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1.15), duly “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ...” (Philippians 2.7). By His own life, ministry, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, Jesus then made possible the granting of the Father’s blessings to fallen sinners the world over (egs., Isaiah 53.4-6ff / Hebrews 2.9-10; 9.12-15,28; 10.19-24 / Titus 2.11-14 / I Peter 1.18-21; 2.24-25 / I John 5.20).

As a result, all “in Christ” are now “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: (the Father) hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1.12-14).

What is more - “Blessed [be] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [places] in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1.3-6, KJV).

And now, after His great cry of accomplishment, “It is finished” (John 19.30), and His resurrection from the dead, Jesus has ascended back to

His Father in heaven. He is seated at His Father's right hand, interceding for us (Romans 8.34 / Hebrews 7.25-27), pleading as our Advocate His own innocent blood shed on our behalf for the propitiation for our sins (eg., John 1.29 / Romans 3.21-26; 5.6-11 / I John 2.1-2; 4.10).

At Jesus' ascension, the disciples were told - "this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1.11). We know that this physical, visible return of Jesus to this earth in power and glory will occur at the end of the seven-year Great Tribulation that is yet to come (Daniel 9.27 / Revelation Chapters 4-19), and will be followed by His millennial kingdom on this earth (egs., Isaiah 11 / Matthew 6.10 / Revelation 20). (We bear in mind that this return is a different occasion from that of Christ's removal of His true Church from the earth before the onset of the Great Tribulation, an event for which we must remain prepared (I Thessalonians 4.13-18 / I Corinthians 15. 51-52)).

Meanwhile we have been given "another Comforter", the Holy Spirit (John 14.16,26; 15.26; 16.7-14 / I Corinthians 3.16; 6.19), who is also interceding for us before God the Father (Romans 8.26-27).

So as we indeed "look up and beyond" the many concerns of these turbulent days, we encounter afresh the bountiful blessings that all who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ possess right now. These blessings have been given to us solely by God's grace: they are permanent, irrevocable, and wonderful. We are to live consciously within these blessings, letting their realities percolate through our daily lives, "rejoicing always", and humbly "holding forth the word of life" as we are able (Philippians 4.4 & 2.16).

For the world needs the merciful redemption of Almighty God as much as ever, the redemption He has made possible, at such dreadful cost, in, by and through His only Son Jesus Christ.

And for its part, God's Word stands tall and firm, clearly setting out all the crucial facts that sinful mankind needs to know. These include on the one hand the many warnings as to events yet to come, when God the Father as the righteous Judge will finally "reckon up"; and on the other, the pathway into salvation by simple faith in Christ, granting to any who will take that path escape from divine judgment - and a profusion of blessings for now and forever.

Truly, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103.2)!

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