

PARCHMENT

AND HE SAID UNTO ME, WRITE: FOR THESE WORDS ARE TRUE AND FAITHFUL.
REVELATION 21:5



The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. Zephaniah 3:17

AN APPRECIATED GIFT

I recently gave a gift to a close friend who played the violin at my wedding free of charge. This lady is a highly talented professional musician, and I wanted her to know that I greatly appreciated her performance at our wedding ceremony. I gave her a voucher to a restaurant along with a hardcover copy of *The Desire of Ages*. I received two phone calls from her afterwards, in which she repeatedly expressed her most utmost gratitude. I've never witnessed a more appreciative response to a gift I've given. And all I gave her was dinner and a (priceless) \$35 book. Nevertheless, hearing her words of gratitude couldn't have made me gladder.

In his final words to the church at Ephesus, Paul quoted a proverb of Jesus and said: "it is more blessed to give than to receive". Acts 20:35. Certainly, Paul's greatest joy was in seeing the fruit of his labour; in seeing the lives of those for whom he worked and suffered transformed by the grace of the Spirit of Christ.

For this cause, Paul perseveringly endured and sacrificed, "with many tears, and temptations". Acts 20:19. The sincerity of his service being shown in the proclamation: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house... by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." Acts 20:20,31.

As *The Acts of the Apostles* reveal, "Paul had been carrying a burden of soul for the churches - a burden so

heavy that he could scarcely endure it". AA 325. It was thus that he wrote to the church at Corinth: "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life". 2 Corinthians 1:8. Paul feared that the 18 months of his labour and self-sacrifice in Corinth was to be in vain. But upon hearing of the reconversion of the Corinthian believers, his cause for anxiety was removed, and he was filled with immense consolation and joy.

"Blessed be God", Paul declared, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;" 2 Corinthians 1:3. The news that his letter had been well received was a breath of new life in his soul. Since the letter he wrote contained a grave yet necessary reproof of sin, Paul had for some time been "weighed down with fear that he might have dealt with too great severity." AA 322.

Yet in light of the letter's outcome - the manner in which his gift was received - he was able to write: "though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance..." 2 Corinthians 7:8-9.

It was experiences such as this that made Paul's life of service so worthwhile. In finding that his gifts - of sacrifice, toil, and de-



votion - had borne fruit in the souls he longed to save, Paul found his greatest joy.

Surely, Paul's experience is but a reflection of the Father and Son's care and long-suffering over us. In Luke 15, Jesus declares: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Luke 15:7. When a gift is well received, it brings immeasurable joy to the giver. And when a child of God repents and accepts the gift of a victorious life (1 Corinthians 15:57) Christ, and all heaven, rejoice.

The prophet Zephaniah highlights the emotion of the Father towards converted souls in the third chapter of his book.

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Zephaniah 3:17.

To a far greater degree than that of Paul, God desires to see that the sacrifice of His Son was not in vain. Thus, the conversion of one sinner leads all Heaven to rejoice, and even the Father sings with joy.

In spite of this, we often fall into the trap of thinking that we're unwanted; that we're too unworthy to be the recipients of God's grace. We decline ourselves the offer of His gifts before we've even approached His word. Yet while we are unworthy of the great gift of Calvary, it is a gift that's already been given. From a time before sin existed, the Father wanted to save you. And in a similar way to Paul, who "with trembling anxiety waited to receive some tidings as to the reception of his message", God is watching to see how you respond to His gift.

Indeed, the opportunity for the pardon of sin and entrance into eternal life is a privilege we don't deserve. But the privilege has been offered. Christ suffered and died to bring you this privilege. How will you respond to His gift?

Will you dismiss it for want of the riches of this world? Will you deny it for fears of unworthiness? Or will you cherish it with utmost gratitude and seek to honour the Saviour for His priceless life?

Certainly, this is what Jesus and His Father desire. Only this will bring joy to God, to the One who gave up all to save you.