

TEXT – Micah 6:8.

*“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”*

Most of us make promises to ourselves to mark the beginning of a new year. We may resolve to save more, to exercise more, less time on the internet, to watch our diet, more contact with the family, work more for the church, more leisure time etc. etc. We begin with good intentions, but before long old habits tempt us to take up our old ways. We slip occasionally, then more frequently, and then most of the time. Finally, it's as if our resolution never existed.

Instead of choosing our own self improvement goals, we might be better to ask ourselves “what does the Lord desire of me?” Our text, through the prophet, answered this in his day when the people were planning all the different sacrifices and offerings they could bring, when he told the people God wants us to do what is right, to be merciful, and to walk humbly with Him. All of these things relate to soul improvement rather than self improvement.

Thankfully, we don't have to rely on our own strength. The Holy Spirit has the power to help us as believers in our Spiritual growth. Ephesians 3: 16-19 *“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ May dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”*

As we begin a new year let us resolve to allow The Spirit to allow us to be more like Christ and to walk humbly with God. The words in the often sung hymn tells us what we should ask of the Spirit.

Holy Spirit, faithful guide!  
Ever near the Christians side,  
Gently lead us by the hand,  
Pilgrims in a desert land.

Apostle Cliff Flor  
North Queensland.

TEXT - 2 Peter 1:3-4.

*"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virture. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

Out of the above words radiates God's eminent love in highest measure. Who and what are we, that the Almighty draws near in mercy to us sinners? Thereby we realize how much He loves His Creation and gives a world full of sin still opportunity for forgiveness and remission. Everything that is needful for it, God has given us through the acknowledgment of His Son! This is the highness (supreme power), which we are called to, that we should be partakers of the divine nature, the blessed love of God, which has come to us in Jesus Christ. The Lord can expect from us, that we will report to as many people as possible, of His redemption work. To tell them that the Lord wants to save all! The love of God is offered to them through us Apostolic Christians.

At an Easter Service we would have heard for certain through the word, of the joy inspiring exclamation of Jesus: "... because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). He is allowed to promise this, because the Heavenly Father gave everything into His hands. HE remained all His life sinless and did what the Father wanted Him to do. We read from the "precious and greatest" promises. And this all - just to be given freely - is unique! We shall be one with HIM and so be one in HIM! This happens foremost through Christ's flesh and blood, which we eat and drink through the bread and wine we partake at the holy communion, so that His life takes over our life. (John 6:53-56) But through every Sunday partaking of the sacraments, the danger could arise of thoughtlessness and habit. May we think of this seriously, to take it honourably for our own salvation and to do it worthily. (one may read with this 1 Cor. 11:27).

We have three Sacraments. Baptism, Sealing and Holy Communion. They are a gift of godly power and love. In them also contains hidden previous and highest promises! Let us aim for the highest goal, through this threefold union on to which we are called to the Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

In our present base condition we surely feel that the share of the divine nature can only come to fruition and Christ's love and holiness come to fullness in us, when we want nothing else but what Christ wants; when all sin and shame will be extinguished! Even though the divine nature is not fully impressed (stamped) upon us as yet, we are allowed to share in eternal life, by His mercy. This is also called salvation-assurance.

Disciples (men and women) of Jesus are in this world, but not of this world. (1 John 5: 4-5) The Hebrew letter in the 11th chapter, verse 13 says to us "... that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." May we live with a "healthy homesickness" for the promised eternal life, because it is certain that the Return of the Lord will come to pass!

"Soul, why do you weary yourself in the things of this earth, which soon will be consumed and dust and ashes become?"

Search for Christ and His Light!

All else will be no help to you." (Hymn)

Apostle Frank Volkmer (Since retired)  
East Germany.

TEXT- John 15:11.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my JOY might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

When we consider these words of our Lord to us, we see He used the word joy, in two contexts, His joy and our joy. His wish was that His joy would always be with us, and our joy would not be half, but at all times in a full measure. We therefore examine this word joy and find it has 3 distinct different meanings in the bible. 1. Natural Joy 2. Moral Joy 3. Spiritual Joy.

Natural Joy according to the dictionary means: "Joy is a delight of the mind arising from the consideration of a present or assured possession of a future good". These natural joys are usually associated with a natural possession and build up in various degrees, and we openly display them in our lives in the show of gladness, exultation, contentment, satisfaction, triumph and cheerfulness.

Moral Joy. This is the joy which arises from the performance of any good actions. It shows itself within us, and sometimes spills openly in the form of peace, serenity of conscience or when it reaches its peak, if honorable, it is called glory.

Both of these joys are those which our Lord referred to as "your joy". These joys can be good or bad depending on the circumstances. To keep this joy good, we must have within us Christ's joy or the Spiritual Joy.

Spiritual Joy. As its name implies is a gift of the Holy Spirit or one of the Fruits of the Spirit. Gal. 5.22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace etc. It has its place within our hearts and shows itself outward by our actions, according to the Bible in the following ways.

A) As a joy of faith Phil 1:25 "I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and JOY of faith."

B) As a rejoicing of hope Heb. 3:6 "But Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

C) Our Joy is God Himself. Psa. 43:4 "Then will I go unto the Altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy."

D) In His promises. 1 Peter 1:8 "Whom having not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable".

E) Joy in the Gospel Psalm 89:15 "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound they shall walk O Lord in the light of thy countenance."

F) The joy that Christ will one day receive the Glory He is due Rev 11:15 "The kingdom of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

G) Joy of our future Rom. 15.13 "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost".

H) And the most important aspect, and that is, spiritual joy is permanent. John 16:22 "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

For this measure we see that the gift of joy is freely available to all, and as we go through life, we should easily be able to see those that have achieved and retained this joy of the Lord, by the open display of their own joys. A person who is not content in their faith, not content with hope, not content with God in His promises in the Bible, self-centered as to a reward, is not ready to receive the joy, and will show by their lives, the lack of joy in their life.

Apostle Cliff Flor  
North Queensland.

TEXT - James 1:23-24.

*"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."*

When I look at myself in the mirror, I often see an enemy!

A "Prima Donna" at the opera-ballet in Paris, expressed herself in a Radio interview. She spoke of the continuous exertions and practices, which are demanded from her body every day, to be able to maintain the top position as the "Prima Ballerina" at the opera. Her body has to undergo every day anew this hard training, so to fulfill these expected performances. Very often she sees therefore an enemy in the mirror who has to be overcome, because most of the time she unwillingly endures the sacrifices and abstinences, which are demanded.

Especially during the Lenten time, quite a few of us have come to notice our mirror image and have not liked what we saw and therefore have declared "war" to our bodies. We all know about the courage, the patience and perseverance that are necessary to better our picture in the mirror. Quite often it is the same with us as the Apostle James described. We love best to forget our mirror image, that is the figure which the mirror shows us as fast as possible. Sometimes other people "mirror" our appearance, because their presence may just disturbingly remind us of our own picture.

But today it goes about something much more important, than the outer appearance. Because Apostle James warned us before such inconsequent behaviour, when God holds the "mirror" of His Word before our eyes. We recognize, while hearing the sermon at God's service or reading in the bible and our scripts, that the Word depicts a spiritual mind or soul-condition, which is resembling ours. Most of the time we don't like to admit it. Our conceptions with the Truth of the gospel to compare with Jesus Christ, observes the risk, that we want to quickly forget the outcome, because mostly it does not correspond. But we cannot keep on like this, because there are many dangers involved with it. The inner, new man, who Jesus wants to create in us, "will win no worldly beauty contest." We are reminded of another word by the Apostle James. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (James 4:4)

These warnings surely point also to those "good sides" of life or the world, which we still only like too much still and whose "friendships" seem all too important to us. Today we want to also accept, that some of these "friends" are God's enemies - and I am deeply convinced that no child of God wants to belong to those.

God grant us strength and courage, to "declare war" to this sometime ugly picture of ourself, and overcome this enemy with the help of our constant and true Friend, Jesus Christ, by the Spirit He has sealed within us.

Apostle Andre Grein (Since retired)  
France.

TEXT -Proverbs 3: 13-15.

*"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her."*

When King Solomon was inspired by the Spirit to write these words, he was certainly writing from experience - For he had found the way to acquire this wisdom and had been able to compare it with the then regarded precious things in life, and as we read, he came to the understanding that nothing in this world can compare with wisdom, and from that the understanding.

The wisdom that Solomon wrote about included all those various meanings of the word found in the dictionaries such as dexterity, skill, sensible, skilful to judge, counsel, insight and power to discern, but Solomon was placing it on a higher level, and was referring to it as a Divine or Godly Gift which can only come from the "Only Wise God". We see, therefore, that it is God's wisdom that can, given the right conditions to abide in man, show forth within us, to understand God's way of doing things, not our own, which will make us happy and understand clearly what value it is to us.

How did Solomon acquire this knowledge? We read in 1 Kings Ch. 3 that when he became king the Lord appeared to him in a dream and asked him, "What shall I give thee?" Solomon confessed that he was as a little child, and knew not what to do, and he asked the Lord for one thing - "Give, therefore, thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people that I may discern between good and bad." It is recorded that this request pleased God, and he answered, "Because that thou hast asked this thing and has not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself nor has asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgement; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." God also promised him that all of those earthly things he did not ask for would be granted to him.

As we read the story of Solomon we see that Kings and Queens came from everywhere, including the East Country, to witness the wisdom that God had given to him. That promise of God came to its conclusion when another group of wise men over 1000 years later, who travelled from the East to come and pay homage to a King that God had put on the earth - The King of Kings, Jesus Christ, who now was to bring greater wisdom to us all. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians Ch. 1 confirms this where he writes "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness but unto them which are called, Christ the power of God and the "Wisdom of God."

For us, the same principles apply in our day. The first step to the wisdom of God is as found in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." We see in God-fearing or acknowledging God's Almighty power and confessing, as Solomon did, that we are but as little children, then it opens the way for prayer. We must acknowledge it is a gift of God as in Eph. 1:17, "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"; and acknowledging this we must then pray for this gift as James writes in James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We see, therefore, every day we should pray for this wisdom; it is one of the gifts of the Spirit that is freely available to all. We will then be able to discern in the world the good and evil, to understand more fully God's meaning of the words found in the Bible, to take into our hearts the Kingdom of God that is preached, to obtain the full peace of being reconciled again with God by the proclamation of forgiveness of sin, to understand the renewal of life within us by the partaking of Christ's Body and Blood, and to look at the events of our daily life with God's Wisdom and not our own - so will fulfil the inner happiness which will show in our outward lives of this great treasure which we have been given from God.

These words would not be complete unless we also are reminded of how Solomon ended his days, even after being granted so much wisdom. We find written in the Bible that Solomon "went not fully after the Lord" and allowed himself to be influenced by the outside world to turn that gift of God into idolatry. We must be ever aware that we never allow idol worship to enter in to anyone who has been given this gift of God "Wisdom."

The gain for all from finding this wisdom is certainly much better than gold in our lives, as it will give us a peaceful life of understanding God's Will, a peaceful life one with another, to understand one another, and an eternal peaceful life with our Lord. Let us all then begin, and continue every day to pray for this Gift of Wisdom.

Apostle Cliff Flor  
North Queensland.

TEXT - Psalm 62:1

*"Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from Him cometh my salvation."*

To wait upon God means "is silent unto God".

When we read some time in the psalms, we will identify that David also, in his life, was torn back and forth between "the silent and the rearing up". One time confident and then also frightened, one time strong and another time weak. It is often the same with our faith one time sky-high jubilant and another time depressed to death.

To silently wait upon God is a whole intrinsic development of our state of belief, which grows from the experience with our Lord. This development is not always in and of an even line. Backlashes are to be expected - but will in no way cause any harm. He who has experienced his belief will be able to confirm this as well as the one who still hesitates and only feels himself along. The Older one will surely have more experience with this development - process. The Young one is on his way to experience his belief - with God.

The silent waiting still seems hard. Contradiction and objection will be voiced. Solutions will have to be found. One can't just be idle and wait. There our soul does rear up somehow.

To revoke oneself and hand over the things of life in trust to God and Christ, has to be learned. Here I recall the verse from our Hymn "Him, Him let do and reign, He is a wise prince and will act this way, that you will be amazed." To be still is also a "confidential matter" in the pressurized times in life it is learned. In Psalm 42:5 it says: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance".

There a man says: "When I stopped wanting to regulate everything myself, to fight and come to terms with my life, it became still within me. My strengths were used up. Now was God's time at last, all my hectic life came to rest."

Who becomes still or is, gives himself the chance to really hear: into himself and to God. Blessed are those who hear God - it is the unrenouncable condition to blessed trading.

He is my safe retreat - in Him I have refuge, He gives me protection. He is my help. He, God, gives the answers I fruitlessly searched for. He, God shows me my way and gives me the strength to go. He is my shelter - He commanded His angels, that they watch over me in all my ways. I am under God's eyes. He has a share in my life.

This brings about, that I will not waver. The belief, yes the whole life, is set on a sure foundation. I will not be rooted up. I have a sure grip. "Take me by the hand, Father."

Officers sometimes feel a certain "unrest" within them before the service. That can by all means be a blessing, because without Him, Christ says, we can do nothing.

May we stay or become quiet and still. Let us rely on His Spirit as our constant helper. God is always close to us.

Apostle Werner Weise (Since retired)  
South Germany.

Christmas Day Thoughts

TEXT – 1 Kings 19:11-13.

*“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord: but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”*

We see therein a prophecy on how God would come within the world, how His word would come. It would not be in the might of the elements, as many believed, but it would be in a quiet still voice. We can only imagine the picture in our minds of a manger, that a baby who for the first time uttered sound within this world, a quiet still cry into the world, crying for the world. He knew that He would have to overcome and conquer, and so the Word of God came into the world in that quiet still voice. We read the gospels and we see how our Lord used that quiet voice at all times to teach us the way of God, to teach us His promises, to teach us how we should live our life. We should be as Elijah, as we once again in our mind's eye picture this quiet still voice. We should put the mantle around ourselves, meaning we should acknowledge that we can achieve nothing without that quiet still voice leading us within our lives. We have already heard how grace came and how righteousness came, and we have heard that when our Lord was born into the world He brought Grace for Grace. Grace for Grace - Let us contemplate on that. He brought this grace so that more grace could continue within the world. How do we go about achieving and playing our part in having this grace dispensed, for without this grace in the world, especially the troubled world we see today, none of us would stand a chance. This was explained to us by the Apostle Paul in his writing to the Corinthians, and we find written in II Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 15: *For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.* One simple line, but we see therein the mystery unfolded of Grace for Grace. It is through the thanksgiving of many that this grace can abound and be sent out into the world, not only to us, but to all who are struggling. Let us on this Christmas day be sure that our thanksgiving unto the Almighty God is pure and genuine, that it recognizes that man was once again restored to have the opportunity to be sons and daughters of God, that grace came into the world, that righteousness has been dispensed, and that a new way stands before all mankind who will believe in this and give thanksgiving for this.

Let us meditate on the role of the shepherds or the first ministry that witnessed the birth of Christ, and we find written in Luke Chapter 2 verse 15 on as follows: *“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen. As it was told unto them.”* We hear there how at the first Christmas, at the birth of Christ, the shepherds were so moved that they spread the word abroad, that they told others of this wonderful event, and they returned and gave glory and praise unto God. We are in that same position; as disciples we can celebrate Christmas. We have witnessed again in our mind's eye the birth of Christ. We can leave it at that. We can say - Yes we have witnessed that; but we should be moved to tell others, to spread this word abroad so that each and every one can feel this peace that came to earth on that day, and above all the shepherds returned to give honour and glory unto the Almighty God. A year stands before us. Let us be sure that we return many times unto the Lord to give praise, honour and glory, and thanksgiving for this wonderful blessing, so that grace for grace can continue to flow in the world.

Apostle Cliff Flor  
North Queensland.

TEXT - Romans 15:1-2.

*"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."*

One of the most provoking answers man has ever given God, is in Genesis 4-9. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Only those can speak like that whose heart is far from God. This raises the question of joint responsibility for our fellowmen, that is of Christians for their brothers and sisters in the community. There are chiefly two parables about this which Christ taught. In the parable of the "prodical son", the son who stayed home, does not feel responsible for his brother in spite of his condition. He is right because his brother received his whole share of the inheritance, but ruined his life through selfishness. But the parable also contains the reproof, for Christ made it very clear that, independent guilt, the saving of mankind is much more important than insisting on one's own right.

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is another. Without any recognizable difference the ten virgins are going to meet the bridegroom. But five of the ten are unwise and miss their salvation. In contrast to the first parable mentioned, there is here for five young women, no "Happy End". As much as this parable hurts, one has to ask, surly, the so called "Wise Ones" must have recognized the lacking condition of the foolish? Why didn't they help? Were they different, did they not care about the foolish? Can one really be going with joy in heart to meet the bridegroom, when one should know that half of us may not make it. The question stands anew about the joint responsibility. It has become very complicated in our time, as we speak of the "Mature Christian", his own responsibility and not being a busybody. Also - can I - should I - may I - must I - be my brother's keeper?

Our text answers this question. "We that are strong", who dares to talk like that about oneself? If we appear to be the better one, the smarter, the more proficient, it would but offend the foolish. Is it not much better to stay out of every thing? After all we have the Apostles, the Ministers, the Sermons etc.? But, now that we know the parable of Christ, can we then still withdraw ourselves from this joint-responsibility? Is there a "Without Me"? Here it is not a matter of thinking to be clever or strong, but the only object is, how far the love is poured out in one's heart (Rom. 5:5) and how much one is honestly concerned about the welfare of another because of this love. Can we - through false consideration (not to busy ourselves in another men's matters) allow, that someone will lose out? We cannot excuse ourselves herewith not to have known that oil is lacking in someone in the Church. Our communities are mostly in size easy to overview and with a little observing, it will not escape us who in the community may be in trouble.

The Bible warns first against judging or despising brothers (and sisters) and advises foremost to set our minds on this - to be to one an offence or cause any annoyance. This also is a responsible act. But our task goes further and shall lead us from holding back to the offensive, the conscious, but loving intervention. In Galatians, the Apostle exhorts to brotherhood and gives the important advice to help someone, who made a mistake, with tender heart and spirit. An unmistakable invitation: "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ". (Gal. 6:1-2)

I MUST HELP! How can we help, is taught that through the carrying of the weak and good conduct, our fellowmen can build themselves up on these virtues. This excludes any highmindness. To form an opinion about the weak in the Church may in some cases be reasonable enough, but we have no right to do this. Only the loving service, the friendly conversation, the brotherly and sisterly love produce trust and encouragement for our fellowman to grow.

This is a lesson for all. "Love your neighbour as yourself"! One could also say: "Dedicate time for your neighbour as much as for yourself." This is in practice difficult. Serving others requires time and we should not be stingy with it. The word egoism is not contained in the Bible. God gives us a lesson in those who are weak, which we can hardly shrink back from. He expects an active community and no self-satisfied or self-conceited Christians, who favour only themselves.

Late Apostle Wilfred Baron  
Germany.